

**Endangered Words and Invulnerable Worlds: Spatial Language and Social
Relations in Cheran, Michoacan, Mexico**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Anthropology)
in the University of Michigan
2021

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the elders of my people, the P'urhépecha. I am especially indebted to tía Lupe Pahuamba Velasquez and abuela Lela Leco Huendo; may this work honor their loving memories. In addition, I dedicate this labor of love to my wife, Xaratanga, and children (Axuni, Tsitsiki, Tanhaxuan, Xupakata, and Tariakuri).

With these words, I recognize and venerate all my living and deceased relatives, the *Eskaksi márku P'urhépecha* 'Amerindigenous', across *Abya Yala* 'North & South America'. For tens of thousands of years, the P'urhépecha have flourished on Abya Yala. Our roots predate 1492.

Acknowledgements

My sincere gratitude goes to my elderly interlocutors in Cheran. I am indebted to Tata Pedro Pahuamba Garcia, Nana Lela Leco Hendo, Lety Pahuamba Leco, Tata Eliseo, Nana Kuka, Nana Celia, Salvador Pahuamba Velazquez, and countless others. My wife, Xara Pahuamba, helped me make magic. Also, Rene Tapia Fabian and Armando Lorenzo Camilo provided me with research assistance.

At the University of Michigan, I thank my dissertation committee members: Dr. Barbra Meek, Dr. Alaina Lemon, Dr. Marlyse Baptista, and Dr. David Frye. I thank my cohort 2012, and I thank Rackham, Tinker, and Firebird. Finally, I must thank the Department of Sociology & Anthropology at URI.

A special thank you to everybody who ever helped me and believed in me: Michael Johnson, Felipe Hernandez, the Robles, the Arellanos, the Ocampos, Dr. Susan Haynes-Burton, Prof. Jeff McMahan, Dr. Rodolfo Otero, Dr. Leah Carroll, Dr. Liu Xin, Dr. Lev Michael. I send a special thank you to my friend, colleague, and editor, Ian Wilson, who has helped iron out all the wrinkles. All errors are my own.

Finally, I would like to offer my sacrifices to the loving memories of bisabuela Josefina, abuelo Ángel and abuela María, abuelita Feliz, abuela Lela, abuela Chucha, tía Lupe, tío Miguel Ángel, tío Felipe, Juan Carlos, Ricardo, Alejandro, Cesar, and many more.

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List of Abbreviations

<u>Morpheme Code</u>	<u>Morpheme</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
AGN	ri-, -ti-	agent nominalization
AOR	-s-	aorist aspect
APP	-ku-	applicative
ASS	-ti	assertive
CAUS	-ra- -ta-	causative
CENTRIF	-pa-, -panta-	centrifuge
CENTRIP	-pu-, -punkwa-	centripetal
COM	-nkuni	comitative
DEM	I, Ima, Inte	demonstrative
EVID	-nha	evidential
FOC	-si	focus
FT	-ka-	formative
FUT	-a-	future
HAB	-sini-	habitual aspect
INF	-ni	infinitive
INST	-mpo-	instrumental
INT	-ki	interrogative
LOC	-ru	locative
MID	-kwari-	middle voice
NMZ	-kwa	nominalizer
OBJ	-ni	object
PARTPP	-kata	patient-oriented participle
PAS	-p-	past

PASSIV	-nha-	passive
PL	-cha-	plural
POS	-ri	possessive
PRED	-i-	predicativizator
PROG	-xa-	progressive aspect
RECP	-pera-	reciprocal voice
RES	=o	residential case
SUB	enka	subordinating conj.
SUBJ	-ka	subjunctive
1		first person
2		second person
3		third person.

Abstract

With many of the world's 6,909 languages becoming endangered at an alarming rate, studies of linguistic variation are of importance to various stakeholders from laymen to scholars. Spatial language proves an important domain since it links grammar, cognition, and culture. While some hold that spatial language encodes uniform concepts, recent research suggests that language-dependent concepts are potentially instrumental in cultural behavior across social contexts. This dissertation examines spatial language use and social relations among speakers of the critically endangered Cheran dialect of P'urhépecha, a Mesoamerican language isolate of Michoacán, Mexico. Based on 28 months of cumulative ethnographic fieldwork, the dissertation describes two primary means of spatial reference, grammatical and discursive, as sharing an underlying part-whole pattern. It argues the part-whole pattern also underlies many cultural practices.

Chapter 1 Introduction

On the drive along the Federal Highway 15, I began seeing an ever-growing range of green-tinted mountains as I entered the western central state of Michoacán. Just as I reached a plateau, I could see another higher one in the distance, something that would continue until I merged onto Highway 37 that led directly to Cheran. The pine trees popped out alongside the highway. The terrain was bumpy, and the road grew ever more winding as we got closer to Cheran. After field seasons in 2013 and 2014, I returned home to Cheran.

The following morning, I could smell a mixture of damp forest and firewood. I gathered my household, and then we walked together over to the home of our elderly relatives. Women were busy sweeping the street in front of their homes. Elderly men covered themselves with large blankets and sat together talking on the corners of streets. The old couple, Tata Pe and Nana Le, was waiting for us in their home. Their small radio was set to the local P'urhépecha language station. Other relatives were present too. Some were my age cohorts and others their children. As we approached the elderly couple, they began speaking to us in P'urhépecha. The other folks present were unable to understand them. They stared in amazement. As we responded to our relatives in a mixture of P'urhépecha and Spanish, I overheard someone say in Spanish, "They really understand and speak Tarasco."

Nana L replied in P'urhépecha, “Yes, they understand P'urhépecha. If only you all did too!”

As many of the world's 6,909 languages are now in danger of extinction (Nonaka 2011, Romaine 2013, UNESCO 2003), researchers and indigenous language advocates are urgently documenting linguistic diversity and studying how particular languages help create and sustain cultural knowledge (Hale 1992; Michael 2011). To that end, scholars have investigated spatial language (SL) as a bridge between cognition and culture. Some researchers claim that SL encodes a universal semantic and conceptual space while others have argued that different languages encode different semantic content. This dissertation examines spatial language use and social relations among speakers of the critically endangered Cheran dialect of P'urhépecha (ISO 639: PUA), a Mesoamerican language isolate of Michoacán, Mexico. This dissertation argues that the part-whole pattern that P'urhépecha speakers reproduce as they locate and orient toward entities in everyday life finds parallels across social relations. The spatial language-based pattern, part-whole, refers to the idea that any given piece is an aspect of a greater whole. Hence, one can state with confidence that P'urhépecha social relations appear to correlate with similar patterns found in spatial language forms and uses in P'urhépecha.

This research project provides an ethnographic account of spatial language use among elderly P'urhépecha speakers and the social significance of grammatical morphemes of spatial reference and spatial language use for ethnic P'urhépecha

regardless of their code use. Code use in Cheran is divided by generations, such that almost all individuals with the ability to speak P'urhépecha fluently are elderly. In contrast, the younger generations, especially those under 50-60 years of age, are fluent only in Spanish and less likely to understand spoken P'urhépecha. Given these code-based dynamics, one could infer that a study of spatial language use would only entail a study of those who possess competence in the code; however, that line of inquiry would presuppose a conceptual and social rupture in the population, which would have to be demonstrated empirically. After all, the anthropological perspective of everyday affairs champions an approach to studying human social life that generates claims based on evidence, rather than presuming that observed phenomena recapitulate the assumed validity of claims of universal trends.

Throughout the following chapters, the reader will find ethnographic vignettes that display the social life of the Cheran P'urhépecha. Instead of positing a pattern that is followed mindlessly, like a computer algorithm, I show that people can possess a default or habituated demeanor, such that they are not always conscious of the reasons for their behavior. However, they still exhibit individual quirks and creativity. People do behave differently to certain degrees. This is part of the reason that many of Cheran's inhabitants, much like other people around the globe, share an ideological view of proper conduct or normative behavior they often flout. Much of what I describe in this dissertation demonstrates that people make great efforts to regiment each other's behavior and affect outcomes they deem

desirable. People do not just mindlessly behave following ideological conventions; they actively try to make things happen, even if only temporarily. Still, despite individual differences, it is apparent that in practice people discursively and culturally produce patterns that are similar to the pattern of linguistic part-whole.

1.1 Literature Review

The rapid decline in linguistic diversity (Grenoble and Whaley 2006) has engendered various lines of inquiry into language endangerment. Of particular concern in research on language endangerment is what might perish along with a dying language (Hinton 2003; Woodbury 1993; Zepeda 2005). This issue forces researchers to rethink language as being culturally particular and fundamental to social life. Some linguists (Himmelman 2006, 2008; Lehmann 2002, 2003; Woodbury 2003) document the language-culture nexus in cases of endangered languages by merging classical structuralist approaches (e.g., grammar, dictionary, texts) with the acquisition of a corpus of naturally-occurring multifunctional speech. It is this combination of structural and documentary approaches to language endangerment that I draw on to examine the nexus of language loss and cultural knowledge loss, which is another view of the relation between language and cultural knowledge (Fishman 1996; Harrison 2007). I seek to show that ethnographic evidence demonstrates behavioral continuity that is potentially of a linguistic origin.

This dissertation draws from approaches to social science that avoid two common errors: presupposing the case without evidence and fruitless dichotomies.

The starting point of the project is to draw from a theoretical notion of culture as socially learned information (e.g., values, skills, knowledge, beliefs) with the capacity to affect behavior (LaLand 2010:138). Within this framework I will avoid two well-known but unproductive dichotomies, nomothetic-idiographic and nature-nurture, which constitute either/or fallacies. In the first dichotomy, nomothetic research generates general propositions or theoretical statements, whereas idiographic research deals with descriptions of the particular (Ingold 2008; Lyman and O'Brien 2004). The problem with this dichotomy is that it overlooks the fact that general propositions must prove valid in contexts and particular descriptions are the starting point for general comparisons. The second dichotomy presents “nature” as inherent traits, characteristics, and behaviors, whereas “nurture” means those traits, characteristics or behaviors arising through social learning and experience in one’s environment. The problem with this dichotomy is that it does a disservice to the complex interaction between biological processes and the social transmission of behavior (see, for example, Marler’s (1994) discussion of inherent and learned aspects of sparrow songs.) The combined force of a theoretical notion of culture as socially learned information and a research agenda that bypasses the implications of unfruitful dichotomies should ensure that this project’s findings will contribute substantial knowledge about how spatial language, conceptualizations, and social relations interact to form nuanced, highly habituated, yet malleable understandings of social space.

This dissertation also draws on ethnographic, linguistic and linguistic anthropological research on spatial language in regard to how people organize spaces and attribute meaning to them in processes of meaning-making. The ethnography of space has long investigated how particular populations' social lives are intricately linked to villages (Evans-Pritchard 1969; Malinowski 1929; Levi-Strauss 1963) and territory (Durkheim 1915). In addition, research has revealed variation in the ways that people have organized domestic spaces (Feldman 1979; Low 1996, 2001; Low and Chambers 1989) and public (Parmentier 1985, 1993). There is significant variation in the ways that people imbue these spaces with meaning (Bourdieu 1970; Liu 2000). More recent studies (Keating 1998; Mueggler 2001) have emphasized space as mediating interactions between different categories of people, thus serving to cement social relations. Furthermore, ethnographers (Kokot 2006; Low 2011; Makley 2003) have also attempted to analyze space in terms of how people envision it ideologically, manifest it materially, and actually use it. Despite these efforts, language has not been considered as playing a pivotal role in the ways that people organize, use, and understand space (Levinson 1996; Low 2009).

In contrast to most ethnographers, linguists have accumulated data concerning the systems used to describe space (Brown 1993; Brugman 1986; Casad 2012; De Leon 2004; O'Meara and Báez 2011; Silverstein 1976). There are three principal linguistic systems that humans employ for the purposes of spatial communication, *deixis*, *topology*, and *frames of reference* (Haviland 1998; Levinson

1996; Lucy 1998). The deictic system indexes objects, entities, and locations, which in doing so grounds the speech utterance into a very particular time and/or place. Researchers (Hanks 1990, 2005) have demonstrated that these systems differ with respect to a speaker or addressee's visual, physical, or social access to a referent. Topology concerns those spatial descriptions (e.g., in, on, at) of a figure (e.g., a dog, towel, car, or person) that is making physical contact with a ground (e.g. an entity). Research on this system (Bowerman and Choi 2001; Bowerman and Levinson 1996; Levinson and Wilkins 2006) indicates that the world's languages make semantic distinctions that contradict claims that all people are born with invariant, spatial primitives. Frames of Reference (FoR's) refer to descriptions of figures in relation to grounds without a physical contact between the two. There are three widely accepted subgroups of FoR's (Levinson 2003; Lucy 1998): **Absolute FoR's**, describe the figure in relation to the ground by way of stable axes such as the cardinal directions; **Relative FoR's** describe the figure with respect to the ground through a speaker's or the addressee's bodily coordinates, for example to the right or to the left; **Intrinsic FoRs** describe a figure with respect to the ground's axes. Most of this data is acquired through controlled elicitation that focuses on reference without any attempt to relate the linguistic spatial system to culture.

While some linguists have eschewed the social dimensions of language, linguistic anthropologists approached research on language as a cultural matrix (Tedlock and Mannheim 1995). One of the fundamental principles guiding linguistic anthropological research is that language is a form of social action (Hill

and Mannheim 1992; Sherzer 1987). Research in this tradition demonstrates the potential interactional constraints of an individual's use of particular linguistic forms (Duranti 1994), the socialization processes incipient from birth that construct cultural beings through language to use language (Meek 2010; Ochs 1998; Ochs and Schieffelin 1984), and that speech itself conveys cultural information that assists speakers in aligning themselves over the course of interactions (Silverstein 2004). Within this tradition, research has demonstrated that language is a multifunctional means of communication with social implications for different categories of individuals across culturally particular contexts (Agha 2005). I draw on this final insight to investigate the links between people's understandings of space, descriptions of space, and organizations of space.

With that in mind, scientific knowledge of the specific relation between language and culture in the spatial domain is hindered by some methodological drawbacks. There are few, if any, empirical investigations into the possibility that particular languages might affect the organization of space as well as people's (understandings of) behavior in it. Rather than a priori proscriptions against such a line of inquiry, this project will undertake empirical research that will then inform theoretical orientations.

Anthropologists have studied space (Feldman 1979; Kokot 2006; Low 1996; Low and Chambers 1989; Makley 2003) by focusing on how different categories of persons create and interact across places while largely viewing language as epiphenomenal to these processes (see, Low 2009, 2011). Recent research

demonstrates that language use is inextricably tied to the social dynamics of space (Danziger 1996, 1998; Duranti 1994; Hanks 1990, 2005; Keating 1998, 2006; Parmentier 1996) and that different languages provide speakers with distinct spatial concepts that might affect how they model social relations (Bennardo 2009, 2014; Bowerman and Choi 2001; Levinson 1996, 2003). While few studies of spatial language have focused on language endangerment settings, the Cheran case reveals that amid language loss the town's Spanish speakers discursively employ the same strategies for locating entities as the elderly P'urhépecha speakers. In the P'urhépecha language this strategy, *part-whole*, occurs at the grammatical and discourse levels and entails locating one entity as part of another, greater entity. At a grammatical level, the most complex body-part locatives exhibit three levels of polysemy. Through metonymy, a complex body-part locative can refer to body parts, spatial areas, and psychosocial qualities. I display the parallels between grammatical part-whole, discursive part-whole, and sociality among the Cheran P'urhépecha.

1.2 Cheran's Recent History and P'urhépecha-speaking Population

The first part of the following section briefly discusses how Cheran's townsfolk endured then routed corrupt politicians and organized criminals. One of the main reasons I mention these events is to show readers that the people of Cheran are their coevals (Fabian 1983) rather than timeless robots extracted from the pages of Ralph Beals' ethnographic accounts of the 1940s. Another reason for

sharing these events is to help make known my interlocutors' experiences to the American public. Across Cheran, people frequently recount how they coped with extortion, murder, and deforestation until they finally ousted the criminals from their community. The events described set in motion P'urhépecha self-governance.

For decades, the people of Cheran endured hardships under corrupt local politicians and criminal organizations. Politicians and their cronies bought property outside Cheran's limits, built extravagant houses, and siphoned funds into their bank accounts. These politicians awarded infrastructure contracts to associates, friends, and externally-based businesses in exchange for bribes. These "companies" committed fraud by buying cheap materials while charging for the most expensive kind. The town's infrastructure was left virtually unchanged. In addition to these crimes, local and state politicians ignored, if not aided, organized crime.

Prior to 2011, the people of Cheran faced criminal violence on two fronts: loggers in the mountains and criminal cells in the community. Heavily armed men toting assault rifles often escorted the loggers, who pillaged the forested mountains in the county's territory every day. Heavily wooded areas became bare hillsides. These criminals nearly ended the traditional way of life for Cheran's woodsmen. Within the community, local businesses were subject to extortion, and individuals received phone calls with threats that they or their loved ones would be captured, tortured, raped, and killed unless they paid thousands of dollars. Those who failed to pay or spoke up often disappeared. Some of the victims were found murdered,

and others remain missing; this was the sorry state of affairs until the uprising of 2011.

In 2011, a group of women gathered on a road that deforesters used to transport logs in the town's barrio *karhakwa* 'up'. The women blocked the road with large household objects such as barrels and their bodies. The deforesters became upset and demanded they remove the objects and step aside. Both sides exchanged insults until all hell broke loose. Cheran's men ran towards the conflict, dragged the loggers out of their trucks, beat them mercilessly, and set their trucks ablaze. During the commotion, Cheran's men grabbed one of the more vocal, intimidating deforesters. They beat him severely, then tried to hang him from a tree adjacent to the barrio's Calvario Church. When the branch broke, the people decided to hold him captive. Cheran's townsfolk blocked and monitored all highways and dirt roads leading to and from Cheran from that point onwards.

Enraged by political ineptitude and corruption, angry townsfolks dismissed the town's mayor, disbanded the local police force, and appropriated their firearms. As a result, a few able-bodied souls formed *la ronda comunitaria* 'community patrol'. The *ronda* began patrolling the town and guarding the barricades that now used burnt vehicles to prevent criminals from entering the community.

During these troubled and uncertain times, the townsfolk started the *fogatas* 'bonfires'. Groups of neighbors met every day and night on their streets to keep vigil. People collectively cooked food and fed households, shared food, and stayed up in case criminals attacked at night. Nobody could walk more than a block without

encountering another *fogata*. If people from one *fogata* encountered someone unknown, they would question that individual to determine town membership and motives for walking around. The town existed in a perpetual state of high alert.

Shortly after the uprising, the people formed a *concejo communal* 'community council'. Having rejected Mexico's political parties, the townsfolk set up a system of representatives from all four of the town's wards. People across the town's fogatas proposed various representatives for each barrio then picked council members by direct vote.

Some of the older inhabitants of Cheran explain the efficacy of their uprising—the formation of fogatas, ronda comunitaria, and concejo comunal—as being due to the town's close-knit nature. They did not experience a population boom as a result of migration by non-P'urhépecha. They contrast this situation with that of other nearby towns such as Paracho, which at a certain point in time did attempt to create a local government similar to Cheran's, but without success. They failed, according to Cheran's inhabitants, because they did not know each other. By contrast, the *fogatas*, consisted of neighbors with consanguine and fictive kinship ties.

In summary, the hardships and uprising altered the political landscape in Cheran. Cheran went from a Mexican political system with a police force to a locally-based council and force comprised of nonpartisan P'urhépecha. I share these events while attempting to 1) avoid fetishizing Indigenous suffering and

death, and 2) avoid converting native suffering into commodities to be bought and sold. My study occurred in the aftermath of the hardships and uprising.

According to SEDESOL (*Secretaría de Desarrollo Social*), in 2010 there were 14,245 people residing in Cheran¹. The Mexican census of 2010 reports the total number of municipal residents 60 years and older as being 1,784, but it is unclear how many of these individuals are living in Cheran. Most of Cheran's fluent P'urhépecha speakers are in their mid-to-late seventies and older, although some people in their sixties also speak the language fluently. However, it is common to encounter people in their early, mid, or late 70's who only possess passive competence in spoken P'urhépecha. What further complicates an understanding of Cheran's P'urhépecha speaker demographics is that a) elderly speakers usually do not admit to speaking P'urhépecha (nor do they generally speak the language with individuals outside of their peer groups such as consanguine, affine, ritual kin and friendship networks) and b) people under 60 years of age tend to insist that nobody speaks P'urhépecha in Cheran. Finally, elderly speakers do not willingly provide information concerning other speakers. This proves to be a general pattern of behavior. Elders seem to know more people than they will ever admit to knowing, and I would argue elders restrict the amount of information they will share with third parties for fear of sowing discord in the community (for example, people are

¹ The SEDESOL Secretaría de Desarrollo Social "Secretariat of Social Development" gathers information from the INEGI (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía* 'National Institute of Statistics and Geography'), which is the governmental agency equivalent to the U.S. Census Bureau. Some of Cheran's inhabitants who work as teachers were quick to point out that the actual population likely exceeded the official numbers.

terrified about being called gossipers, and discord in Cheran often results in witchcraft.)

1.3 Research Methods

The research project was divided into three overlapping phases: spatial ethnography, linguistic ethnography, and controlled linguistic elicitation. In turn, I obtained three types of data: 1) ethnographic participant observation of cultural behavior (interactions and language use between individuals); 2) semi-structured interviews (which elicit how people describe and understand space); 3) linguistic elicitation (which elicits how people understand the semantic denotation and grammatical patterning of spatial forms in any interaction).

1.3.1 Sampling: Target Population and Sample

For the purposes of linguistic elicitation and interviews, I recruited 10 participants from Cheran. I employed a nonprobability sampling method called Respondent Driven Sampling (Heckathorn 1997), which improves on snowball sampling because it ensures that participants volunteer to participate and recruit other willing participants. The participant total is justified by previous research on cultural domains (Bernard and Ryan 2009) and space (Levinson and Wilkins 2006) that has produced valid, generalizable, and replicable results with 10 to 13 knowledgeable individuals before reaching data saturation (Weller and Romney 1988).

To capture the ethnographic particulars of language use in context, I worked closely with five P'urhépecha-speaking key informants from different households. I analyzed my informants' P'urhépecha spatial language use, semantics, and the significance of interactions and the spaces in which they occurred.

1.3.2 Fieldwork and Position

On a daily basis I employed participant-observation. I produced descriptions of events from two distinct vantage points, at times as a participant in activities and at times as an observer. When possible, I took photos and video recordings of specific activities. On-the-spot note-taking proved impractical among P'urhépecha populations. In some instances, individuals would explicitly tell me to watch, listen and remember. In other instances, individuals would basically eschew any interaction with me if I did not give them my full attention, as this is taken to be a sign of disrespect. Hence, I generally took notes each night.

With permission from each interlocutor, I made audio and video recordings during the semi-structured interviews. During the interview sessions, my interlocutors spoke about life/town/region histories, nonhuman entities and rituals. These narratives provide insight into how people grammatically describe a wide range of spaces along with the types of activities that occur in them. One of my chief goals is to understand how people solve problems of describing and locating entities in space. Since previous research has emphasized isolated linguistic subsystems in controlled elicitation, it has been unclear as to how people actually go about using spatial language in everyday life. Another major goal is to then

examine how these same spatial terms are used for other communicative functions. The combined effect of these goals will shed light on how people across different situations come to employ spatial language. This will aid understanding of how people imbue and understand space with particular meaning.

In addition, I also elicited grammatical data through various means such as: 1) the topological relations picture series; 2) direction elicitation; 3) metalinguistic commentary. These linguistic elicitation methods are intended to provide a formal understanding of the grammatical patterning of spatial language. The topological relations picture series (Bowerman and Pederson 1992) consists of 71 pictures of objects (e.g., an apple in a bowl) in various positions with respect to one another. Direction elicitation consists of asking people how to get to places near and far (Bennardo 2014). Metalinguistic commentary (Hanks 2005) is when an informant is asked what a word means, why it is chosen, and why another would or wouldn't work.

As a P'urhépecha myself, I was motivated to study language use in Cheran. I am also linked to families across the town through paternal lineages via my spouse and children. Another big part of my motivation stems from my sense of duty to my tribe, the P'urhépecha people. Cheran's last generation of P'urhépecha speakers are elderly. So, my work is not just for the benefit of Cheran, but rather all P'urhépecha people. Instead of reproducing regionalism, I have always promoted an approach to engaged activities that would benefit any and all P'urhépecha people. As much as I sought to avoid the "native anthropologist label" and show myself to be an

intellectual who can observe ethnographic data objectively and detached, even as others boasted their engaged activities, I could not escape doing engaged work. Hence, my research involves interviewing the elderly as a means of providing future generations with knowledge—which is in a sense a grassroots “salvage” project.

People came to find an interesting, yet odd, character in me. Interesting in that I care about aspects of everyday life that people themselves care about. Some of my interlocutors were loggers and woodworkers, my questions about their lifelong careers made them smile. Others raised children and provided for them through sewing and other forms of labor that aided the household. My spouse, who served as a research assistant, always accompanied me in interviews with elderly females. Without her presence, I would have only been granted access to the world of men. Such are the gendered divisions among P’urhépecha people. Some found me a bit odd because they wondered about my line of work. I dressed like other in town—jeans, sweaters, and polo shirts. However, I was usually hanging out with different elderly couples. Nobody thought of me as an academic, since academics in Mexico dress in suites and avoid everyday affairs. My working class upbringing obscured my emerging role as an academic from an elite institution of higher learning. When people asked my profession, I explained it to them. They referred to me as a teacher.

1.4 Overview of dissertation

The dissertation develops its argument by starting with an analysis of P’urhépecha spatial language use in chapter 2. The main goal of chapter 2 is to

show the properties of the grammatical morphemes used for spatial reference, more specifically, the complex group of spatial locatives, and also display the discursive means of spatial reference that follows a pattern similar to part-whole. Chapter 3 proceeds to show how P'urhépecha evaluate each other through notions of respect across linguistically mediated interactions. In some interactions, people rely on active social regimentation to undermine hierarchies based on embodied sociological categories. In other interactions, people exchange narratives that explicitly condemn negative behavior as an indirect means of highlighting social propriety. Chapter 4 explores kinship-based relations as foundational for social relations. I demonstrate how Cheran P'urhépecha regard individuals as being embedded in complex webs of social relations, especially patrilineal lineages on both the paternal and maternal side. People rely on reciprocal exchanges to carry out life stage events, larger collectives across multiple activities that link individuals by kinship and friendship bonds. Chapter 5 reveals key sources of anxiety among Cheran's inhabitants: behavioral, seasonal, and agricultural. It further explains a ritual event as an attempt to mediate these anxieties and provide stability and desired outcomes. Across this ritual, people rely on kin-based social relations to carry out activities on a community-wide scale. In the conclusion, I summarize the evidence presented throughout the dissertation to offer final thoughts on the parallels between body-part spatial locatives and discursive acts of spatial reference as well as cultural practices. I also discuss the implications of this dissertation for studies

of endangered languages, spatial language, and research with Indigenous communities.

Chapter 2 Spatial Language Use

In the *Ementa* ‘rainy season’ of 2015, my household traveled by bus, then taxi, on potholed roads across mountainous terrain to *p’urhémipini* ‘visit’ Lily. She awaited us under the eaves of the metal roof that protruded slightly from the front of her home’s adobe walls. The eaves clearly provided little protection from the rain, as her embroidered blouse and colorful apron were soddened. She gave us refuge from wind and water indoors, in front of her *parankwa* ‘hearth’. As the burning pinewood’s smoke embraced us, we drank hot *kamata* ‘corn porridge’ and we talked. When the rain stopped, a loudspeaker suddenly blasted the boisterous voice of a man advertising chili peppers, corn cobs, and corn husks. The cacophonous sales pitch drowned out our chat for a few minutes. We drank some more. The rain began to pound harder on the metal roof, before eventually settling into a gentle rhythm. The loudspeaker died down too. It was then that Lily recalled a loudspeaker announcement in the 1980’s about a dog. Since dogs run rampant on the unpaved or cobblestoned streets of P’urhépecha towns, we pricked up our ears. Lily recounted that the man had issued a warning about a rabid dog, first in P’urhépecha then in disfluent Spanish: “Please stay indoors. Do not visit the

plaza. In the town center there is a *wichu mongari* ‘dog whose face has moved’²!” Lily’s punchline provoked unrestrained laughter among us all.

There is an important reason that I vividly remember this chat. Generally, P’urhépecha speakers do not discuss the locative suffixes—see below, also footnote 1—that describe lived space. Locative suffixes are normally beneath the threshold of awareness. Lily directed our attention to the fact that the loudspeaker announcer mistranslated *wichu mongari* as a face that has moved rather than a psychosocial meaning. To use this as a punchline, Lily relied on our understanding of the word *mongari* but more importantly, that part of the word, the locative suffix *-ngari*- ‘face’ arises in other contexts. Lily’s astute, if not unusual, observation underscores the idea that P’urhépecha speakers can deploy and interpret a certain class of special locatives in multiple ways. While some locatives refer to single referents, other locatives are polysemous, that is they denote multiple meanings. What more do these mundane acts of spatial reference entail socially?

I will answer the questions posed above with a combination of linguistic and ethnographic study of language use in context³. This chapter describes closely related practices of spatial reference that rely on grammatical or discursive

² P’urhépecha speakers refer to rabid dogs as *wichu mongari*. *Wichu* denotes dog. The word *mongari* is comprised of the following morphemes: *mo-* is the verbal root for movement, *-nhari* is the locative suffix of space that denotes a location (flat surface, generally vertical), a body-part (a face), or a psychosocial quality (fear, anger, respect etc.) Hence, Lily’s punchline was effective because she pointed out how a P’urhépecha speaker was unable to successfully translate the word into Spanish. The problem arose because of the polysemy of suffixes of space.

³ Only through ethnography could one truly grasp and appreciate the complexity of spatial linguistic forms in use. An extracted data set does not really do justice to the various complexities and contingencies of real-world speech, and experiments are far too unrealistic and removed from everyday affairs to display sufficient details about these linguistic forms.

properties. The grammatical approach to spatial reference consists of a subset of body-part locatives that are 1) beneath the threshold of awareness, 2) obligatory, and 3) polysemous. The discursive approach to spatial reference consists of acts of orientation and location that divide into descriptions of visible or invisible referents. I argue that the grammatical and discursive means of referring to space share an underlying part-whole pattern.

In the first section, I describe those linguistic properties of the P'urhépecha language that are relevant to the overall ethnographic study of the relationship between spatial language use and social life. This brief sketch should provide the reader with a sense of the language's means of conveying messages between addressers and addressees. The second section describes two means of spatial reference: obligatory morphemes and default strategies. The third section discusses the theoretical issues arising from studies of spatial language. It teases out two mutually compatible patterns—allocentric orientation and part-whole—as potentially arising in cultural practice.

2.1 P'urhépecha Language

The following section provides the reader with a general sketch of the properties of the P'urhépecha language and an exploration of issues emerging in research on spatial language. While discussing the P'urhépecha language, I help the reader achieve an understanding of the nature of P'urhépecha word formation,

which will prove pivotal to the argument developed across subsequent chapters, which draws from spatial morphemes and discursive acts of location and orientation.

2.1.1 P'urhépecha

P'urhépecha is a language isolate without known genetic affiliation inside or outside Mesoamerica. A handful of scholars (e.g., Maurice Swadesh and Joseph Greenberg) have proposed an ancient genetic relationship between P'urhépecha and Quechuan or even Chibchan languages. Despite the eye-catching nature of these claims, few if any linguists have attempted to systematically analyze these languages to ascertain whether they are in fact genetically related⁴.

The P'urhépecha language is polysynthetic with agglutinative morphology in which suffixes primarily account for inflection and derivation.

1. Wanta
 Wanta- Ø
 Speak (imperative)

- 1.1. Juramuni 'order someone to do something'
 Jura-mu-ni
 order-mouth-INF

- 1.2. Juramuti 'law giver'
 Jura-mu-ti
 order-mouth-AGN

- 1.3. Juramukwa 'law'
 Jura-mu-kwa
 order-mouth-NOM

⁴ Recently, a researcher (Bellamy 2018) published a doctoral thesis comparing P'urhépecha to Quechuan languages via the lexicon of metallurgy. The study's results were unable to demonstrate a genetic relationship between the languages.

In example 1, I display a root can serve as a complete word in the imperative.

Example 1.1., 1.2., and 1.3., each differ by a single suffix. The infinitive suffix, -ni- converts the stem *juramu-* into a verb; the agentive suffix, -ri-, converts the stem into an agentive noun; and the nominalization suffix, -kwa, converts the stem into a noun.

In addition to suffixes, both reduplication and stress, in a much more restricted sense than suffixing, are alternative means of inflection and derivation (Chamoreau 2003; Foster 1969; Villavicencio 2006).

2. Aspi-aspi-mu-ni
good tasting-good tasting-mouth-INF
Tasting very delicious food
3. Karáni
write
4. Kárani
fly

One of P'urhépecha's attributes, rare for a Mesoamerican language, is its tense, aspect, and mode system, which is more productive than most languages in the area (Suarez 1983).

Tense

1. Past -p-
Wanta-s-p-ti
Speak-AOR-PAS-AGN.3
2. Present Ø
Wanta-ni
Speak-INF

3. Future -a-
Wanta-a-ka
Speak-FUT-AGN.1/2

Aspect

1. Aorist -x-
Wanta-x-ka
Speak-AOR-AGN.1/2
2. Progressive -xa-
Wanta-xa-ka
Speak-PROG-AGN.1/2
3. Habitual -sini-
Wanta-sin-ka
Speak-HAB-AGN.1/2
4. Continuous -xam-
Wanta-xam-ka
Speak-CONT-AGN.1/2

Mode

1. Assertive -ka, -ti
Wanta-s-ka,
Speak-AOR-ASS
2. Interrogative -ki
Wanta-s-ki
Speak-AOR-INT
3. Imperative – Ø
Wanta- Ø
Speak!
4. Exclamative -ka
Wanta-ka
Speak-EXC
5. Conditional -pirini
Wanta-pirini
Speak-COND

It is also a nominative accusative language with case, postposition, and flexible word order (Villavicencio 2006). The example below displays a nickname the adjective charapiti ‘red’, the infinitive verb choose, and the noun wichu ‘dog’ marked for object case =ni.

5.

Charapiti	erakuni	wichu=ni
Red	chooses	dog
S	V	O

charapiti	wichu=ni	erakuni
Red	dog	chooses
S	O	V

Wichu=ni	erakuni	Charapiti
dog	chooses	red
O	V	S

Wichu=ni	charapiti	erakuni
Dog	red	chooses
O	S	V

erakuni	charapiti	wichu=ni
chooses	red	dog
V	S	O

erakuni	wichu=ni	Charapiti
chooses	dog	red
V	O	S

According to Suarez (1983) its phonological inventory is rather common in Mesoamerica, with the exception that it possesses aspirated voiceless stops (an uncommon characteristic of the linguistic area).

	<u>bilabial</u>	<u>alveolar</u>	<u>postalveolar</u>	<u>velar</u>	<u>labiovelar</u>
Nasal	m	n		ŋ	
Aspirated	p'	t'	ch'	k'	kw'
Non-aspirated	p	t	ch	k	kw
Fricative		s	ʃ	x	
Rhotic		r	ɾ		
Approximant			j	w	

	<u>Front</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Back</u>
Close	i	ï	u
Mid	e		o
Open		a	

2.2 Spatial Language: Obligatory Morphemes and Default Discourse

The following section will examine the properties of obligatory morphemes of spatial reference and discursive reference of space. Discursively, in visible contexts addressers and addressees share perceptual access to referent and ground. In scenarios where neither addresser nor addressee have immediate perceptual access to referent and ground, Cheran's P'urhépecha speakers rely on shared knowledge, which takes the form of salient cultural entities. At first glance this observation seems trivial, but upon closer inspection it reveals a part-whole pattern.

2.2.1 Spatial Locatives: Body Part Suffixes

P'urhépecha speakers deploy grammatical morphemes for spatial reference—the spatial locatives⁵. These locatives are exclusively suffixing, attaching to a root or stem⁶. Hence, scholars often refer to them as the suffixes of locative space. One of the P'urhépecha's interesting means of describing space arise in detailed meanings that are conveyed within a single suffix in a word (Friedrich 1970; Monzon 2004; Chamoreau 2009). For example, one can consider two instances of derived terms based on the single root *k'arhi*- 'dry' that differs by a single suffix (a paradigmatic alternation along a sequence):

K'arhimaxaka
K'arhi-**ma**-xa-ka=ni
Dry-stomach-progaspect-indmood=1stPcase.
I am hungry

K'arhichaxaka
K'arhi-**cha**-xa-ka=ni
Dry-throat-progaspect-indmood=1stPcase.
I am thirsty

These two suffixes of space, *-ma-* and *-cha-*, can be used to productively describe the particular area of an object or type of object affected. In a literal sense, one can translate the first example as 'my inner stomach is drying' and the second as 'my throat is drying'. Or, 'drying inside a rotund object' and 'drying sticklike figure'.

⁵ The foremost authority on P'urhépecha body-part suffixes of space, was Paul Friedrich. Since his groundbreaking publications, scholarship on the language has been a footnote to him. This dissertation draws from insights into the properties of spatial locatives to offer a fresh, original perspective on their import to sociocultural life—whether communicative or organizational.

⁶ P'urhépecha words are grounded in roots or stems. These roots exist as neither verbs nor nouns since morphological suffixes must render them into verbs or nouns. For instance, the root *kw'ani*- 'throw' becomes a noun by adding *-kwa*, *kw'ani-ku-kwa*; whereas *kw'ani-ku-ni* becomes a verb by adding the infinitive suffix *-ni*.

Most Mesoamerican languages (Suarez 1983) employ the same terms for body parts and spatial locatives. In other words, languages like Zapotec (Maclaury 1989), Mixtec (Brugman 1983; Hollenbach 1995), Totonac (Levy 1999), and Nahuatl (Lockhardt 2001) rely on the process of metonymic extension to use body part nouns to convey spatial information. P’urhépecha differs from these languages because its speakers do not use body-part nouns for the purpose of spatial reference, but rather they rely on specialized locative suffixes. For example, Jaki -ku- ‘hand’, PENCHUMEKWA -mu- ‘mouth’, KUTSIKWA -nti- ‘ear’. A speaker, thus, might say epu ‘head’ or say tupu-tsi when describing a bald person (see, table below for list of body part terms).

English Gloss	P’urhépecha Noun	P’urhépecha spatial suffix
Head	Epu	-tsi-
Neck	Anhachakwa	-cha-
Face	Kanharikwa	-nkari-
Mouth	Penchumikwa	-mu-
Nose	Urhi	-ru-
Ear	Kutsikwa	-nti-

Table 1 Body Part Spatial Locatives

Researchers have long described differences in the degree of semantic complexity exhibited by P’urhépecha language spatial locatives. One group of locatives carry single spatial referents. Another group of locatives carry dual-referents: spatial areas and body-parts. The third, more complex, group of locatives can refer to spatial areas, body-parts, and psychosocial qualities. In what follows, I will describe the properties of the third, more complex, group of locatives, which render them prerequisites as ‘thinking-for-speaking.’

The first property of grammatical morphemes of spatial reference is that they exist beneath the threshold of awareness. In the first instance, speakers of P'urhépecha are generally unable to describe a morpheme's meaning outside of its linguistic and social contexts. This phenomenon is not uncommon to suffixes nor to the P'urhépecha language. A morpheme, that is a meaningful segment of sound, usually lies beneath both a speaker's and an addressee's threshold of awareness (see Boas 1911; Sapir 1927; Jakobson 1944; Whorf 1956; Silverstein 1981, 2004; Bloom 1981; Friedrich 1986; Lucy 1992). For instance, consider the following ethnographic example that displays a P'urhépecha speaker's unconscious use of body part suffixes.

During my initial attempts at linguistic elicitation, I worked with an elderly interlocutor. I was under the mistaken impression that I could utter a given bound morpheme from a list to elicit from her a description of its meaning, some form of metalinguistic reflection on its use, and even a few sample utterances built off of it. Having spent years studying the morphological properties of the P'urhépecha language, I had developed an ability to associate the utterance of the bound morpheme, extracted from use, with a given number of spatial meanings. My interlocutor, an elderly first-language P'urhépecha-speaking consultant, found my utterances odd if not unrecognizable. For example, I asked, "Could you tell me the meaning of *-nti-*?" The suffix *-nti-* could refer to the ear or shoulder or a flat surface at ground level. She asked me to repeat it. I did. She uttered it herself, mispronouncing it, then asked me if she had said it correctly. I repeated the suffix,

and she replied, “What does -nti- mean?” Her expression revealed a degree of confusion mixed with frustration. She then concluded, “That’s English, right? You’re asking me something in that language?” When I responded that I was trying to elicit meanings in P’urhépecha, more precisely body part meanings, she responded “I just don’t know.” I looked down in my notebook, and her eyes glanced down there too. In an encouraging tone she said, “Try something else. You have other stuff, right?” I then moved to the next suffix on the list, “How about -tsi-?” The suffix -tsi- could refer to the ground (usually with a bumpy surface). She squinted her eyes and moved her head and body closer to me to hear the sound.

I felt disappointed in myself. After spending years of my life training as a linguistic anthropologist, I was unable to get the “data.” Later that night, I reflected on my elicitation session: Did I mispronounce the linguistic forms? I prepared for my next visit by making a newer list with roots and words with those roots. When we spoke again, I offered the suffix in isolation to no avail. I then said a word with a body part suffix and asked her to tell me what the word meant. She quickly and easily did so. I then picked one of the suffixes that elicited nonresponses the last time around and used them with the word. She answered my questions without delay. Some of the word-suffix combinations required contexts too. Sometimes she would provide me with an example and other times I gave her examples.

As I reflect on my elicitation session, I found a general pattern among P’urhépecha speakers. Their responses to linguistic forms are usually grounded in

actions people do in everyday lives. She knew I was seeking her knowledge of the language and agreed to help me out. She, too, became sad since she thought that her lack of formal education made her unable to help. I assured her that was not the case. It became clear through failure that folks know the meaning the suffixes but not outside of their linguistic-contextual environments. They needed either a scenario or a word. It was a fool's errand to elicit these suffixes decontextualized and in abstraction, especially since some of the suffixes carry more meaning than others⁷.

The second property that spatial morphemes exhibit is that they are obligatory and dependent morphemes. As P'urhépecha speakers engage in speech, they must convey information that is understandable to their listener. People experience countless exchanges with speakers in similar events. Even in novel events, one is forced to guess, something likely to be understood, which can lead to a pattern of guessing shared among speakers who frequently interact. A given speaker of P'urhépecha uses a verb stem then picks a suffix out of a paradigm of spatial locatives.

It is only through a paradigm that speakers can express the various forms of spatial information they desire. The language does not possess another means to describe topological relations to the degree of specificity permitted by the locative suffixes. As a test case, I asked speakers to think through a word that lacked a

⁷ One is tempted to explain away the phenomena through phonology. P'urhépecha does not permit nasal, stop initial words, thus -nti- would seem odd to all P'urhépecha speakers since words do not begin in that sequence. However, the same holds true for other sound sequences that do exist in the language. For instance, plenty of words begin with -tsi-, -chu-, -ku-.

locative suffix in its slot (following the root) then produce a few options. They gave me blank stares. However, when I myself provided the suffix, they unanimously provided me with details about the types of activities that such a word could describe.

In everyday conversations, people draw from a paradigm to express their thoughts. Only individuals intentionally attempting to play with language, such as a storyteller, singer, or poet, make well-thought efforts at picking a suffix from the paradigm that might be used to describe something in a way that is close enough to everyday use, but differs such that people find it comical or innovative.

The third property that spatial morphemes exhibit is polysemy. Paul Friedrich (1971:12) described spatial suffixes as resources that speakers used to describe objects, entities, and places. Consider the way P'urhépecha speakers deploy the suffixes *-ngari*- 'face'.

(1)

Uaa kustungaritani
uaa kutsu-ngari-ta-ni
Can rub-face-2/3rd obj-infinitive
Can rub face it ?
'Can I erase the chalkboard?'

(2)

kuere-ngari
filthy-face
Dirty (appearance)

(3)

ampe chongarisini?
What fear-face-present.aspect-inf
What are you scared of (in the dark)?

These examples serve to show that P'urhépecha speakers employ the facial spatial suffix to describe a vertical flat, inanimate surfaces (example 1) and non-flat, circular animate surface such as a human face (example 2). The suffix also enables speakers to describe abstract concepts such as a particular form of fear of the dark (example 3).

Indeed, the first example perfectly displays the ways polysemy complicate acts of reference for speakers. The word itself is difficult for P'urhépecha speakers to understand outside of a linguistic context that provides pragmatic context in which speaker and addressee have visual access to referent and ground. To say “can I wipe the face” while standing in front of a chalkboard is immediately understandable to P'urhépecha people, even if they do not use chalkboard—which is the case with most elders. To say the same while sitting drinking tea would cause elders to pause and guess at your statement.

Chamoreau (2009) categorizes spatial locatives into three groups based on an element's semantic complexity. The tripartite distinction helps the reader understand that different types of semantic complexity are at play. The first level consists of singular referents. The second medial level incorporates terms whose semantic referents are two entities. The third level describes elements with maximal polysemy, often describing spatial array (outside of body), one's own body, or psychosocial characteristics of states of mind.

Certain circumstances will lend themselves towards certain forms, for example, if someone is attempting to locate an item on the floor. Is the item (flat,

round, oblong) on an external floor, on a street or road, or anywhere else outside a living compound? In the former instance, -ra- and the latter -tse-. The first of these examples falls into the least complex category since it only denotes a spatial area, but the latter form can denote two meanings, one spatial and another psychosocial.

The medial and complex forms display polysemy. Interestingly enough, some of the most abstract forms reside in suffixes that describe areas in or around the face-head. For instance, the word for thinking in the P'urhépecha language is *eratsini* comprised of the following morphemes: *e-* 'see', *-ra-* 'to cause' (together they form *era-* which speakers conventionally use to describe seeing something a distance away), *-tsi-* head, top, thought, *-ni-* infinitive. Thus, P'urhépecha speakers grammatically encode thought as an action in which someone is seeing into the head, which implies this area is distant (at least in a theoretical sense).

In this section, I focused on the three properties of the complex grammatical morphemes of spatial reference. The body-part locatives are habitual in the sense that while describing an action or state in contiguity, containment or immediate adjacency, a speaker must employ a linguistic resource out of a finite paradigm. As a system, these suffixes' innermost root, share a basic idea, part-whole. For instance, a given morpheme denotes a foot, head, arm, stomach, which exist as parts of a bodily whole (Friedrich 1970, 1984; Capistran 2011; Chamoreau 2009).

In the next section, the discussion turns to discursive reference of location and orientation. The major distinction consists of visible and invisible referents. P'urhépecha speakers make use of visual access as a means of establishing

knowledge of something. These forms of spatial reference can range from being a default to being strategic.

2.2.2 Discursive Reference: Location and Orientation

In the following examples, I provide the reader with discursive referential patterns that occur with visible referents. These are all realistic scenarios, meaning they consist of everyday items, in everyday positions in everyday settings. The figure is a small cup, and the ground can alter depending on the cup's location in small scale space within the everyday living compound. The P'urhépecha consultant is 74 year-old Nana L who is a first-language P'urhépecha speaker who learned Spanish in her teenage and young adult years. She was born and raised in Cheran.

The living compound is a highly appropriate elicitation space since Nana L spends much of her time there daily—attending to daily chores like washing clothes, cooking food, and eating and talking. She resides here with her husband and grown daughter.

1) Intrinsic Frame of Reference



Figure 1 Nana L locating a cup in the courtyard of the living compound

1. Jiniani tátsipani énkari t'u jaka
There behind where you are
It is behind you
2. Jiniani tatsipani jarhasti parhantini énka t'u jaka
There behind it is on the ground that you are
It is on the ground behind you
3. Hasta jiniani tatsipani
Until there behind
Behind you over there

The scenario is an example of reference in medial space. In line 1, Nana deploys an intrinsic frame of reference to locate the cup. To understand Nana L's utterance in line 1 requires that we consider the person eliciting discursive reference from her was looking at her and standing in the courtyard. He asked her, "Where is the cup?" The cup is the referent, and the ground is the person asking for its whereabouts. Nana L deploys the deictic *jiniani* 'there' (non-visible) since the cup is behind the person requesting her to tell him its location. Nana L marks the person

as the ground by uttering, *enkari t'u jaka*, where you are at. It is worth noting that the cup is directly behind the person, but not touching him. So, the addresser does not consider the addressee's perceptual access to the referent while making her referential statement. Line 2 appears similar to the description in line 1 but differs since Nana L begins by omitting the ground only to mention him again at the end of the utterance with additional detail: *parhantini*. The word *parhantini* makes use of the spatial locative *-nti-* which refers to the flat surface of the paved portion of the floor inside the courtyard. Line 3 completely omits the ground, the person, while still relying on the adposition *tatsipani* to help the addressee locate the cup. The following example demonstrates a situation that invokes use of topology.

2) Topology Scenario 1



Figure 2 Locating a cup near the bottom of a table

1. Jantukutini jimini parhatsitakwarhu ya
Being from the foot there in the place of the table ok
It is at the foot of the table

Nana L makes use of the term, *jantukutini*, which is comprised of the root, *ja-* which denotes being in a place, the spatial suffix *-ntu-* which denotes foot or an area similar to a foot such as the table's foot, and the deictic *jimini* which denotes a visible there. The suffix *-rhu* makes it clear that the speaker is conveying to the addressee that it is at the table's foot where one will locate the cup. Both addresser and addressee are seated adjacent to each other with perceptual access to the figure (cup) and ground (table). Nana L is deploying a topological description. The topological description must make use of the deictic to retain grammaticality. If she opted to avoid use of the deictic then she would have had to have shortened the message, which is possible. In such a manner, she might have said “*jantukutini*.” However, P'urhépecha speakers generally describe situations with a great degree of detail.

3) Topology Scenario 2



Figure 3 Locating a cup on the other end of the table

1. Jimini ladu jarhukutini parhatsitakwarhu
There side being from the nose table place of
It is on that side, the nose (opposite edge) of the table.

In line 1, Nana L uses the visible deictic *jiminy* with a Spanish loan word, *ladu*, side. With the word *jarhukutini*, Nana L is deploying the body part suffix for nose, *-rhu-*. Since both addresser and addressee are looking at the cup from the opposite end, the table would point away from them. One can deduce this setup by looking at the table as having a front and back via length and sides via width. She is using a basic topological description since the cup is on the table.

4) Mixed Discursive Strategies



Figure 4 Locating a cup with vertical axis

1. Terukanikwarhu parhatsikutini kétsikwa jarhasti ya
Middle place of table from below it is ok
It is beneath the middle portion of the table ok
2. Jimini inchachukutini jarhasti ya parhatsitakwarhu ya
There from inside the bottom it is ok table ok
It is there inside beneath the table ok

Nana L describes the specific location of the cup, in the middle, beneath the table in line 1. She makes use of *ketsikwa* ‘down’ *jarhasti* ‘it is’ to establish a vertical axis beneath the middle *terukanikwarhu* of the table with the form *parhatsikutini*. In line 2, she deploys the deictic *jimini* since both she and her addressee have perceptual access to the referent. The term *inchachukutini* consists of *incha-* inside,

the spatial locative *-chu-* which can denote an inner bottom area or a body part such as the lower extremity of the human body cavity (buttocks or vagina). In this instance, Nana L has used a vertical frame of reference (intrinsic) then followed up with a topological description of the scenario.

Some (Capistran) have claimed that speakers of the language cannot mix the two systems. Yet, here we have evidence of a speaker doing just that. She is using a frame of reference and a topological description with locative suffixes to describe the same spatial arrangement. This is not an isolated instance.

5) Mixed Discursive Strategies



Figure 5 Locating a cup a short distance from addresser and addressee

1. P'arhatsitakwesti enka jimini jaka
Table it is that there it is
The table is there
2. Jimini jarhasti jamukutini cocinarhu ya
There it is being from the mouth kitchen place of ok
It is there at the kitchen's entrance
3. Terunukwa jarhasti

Middle patio it is
It is in the middle of the patio (courtyard)

This description is the most complex since it is slightly ambiguous. Nana L seems to be referring to the table in line 1. We can posit that she is making a referential statement about the table since she combines the word for table with the aspectual suffix -s- for passing present moments, and the third person mode, -ti, which she follows up with *enka jima jaka* which translates as “that is there.” In line 2, she begins by using a deictic and post-position which leave the referent tacit. She follows up with *jamukutini* comprised of the body part suffix -*mu*- used to refer to doorways then the Spanish loan word *cocina* ‘kitchen’ and locative case -*rhu* meaning place of. Line 3 makes it clear that the referent left tacit in line 2 is in fact the cup, which makes sense since the question posed to Nana L concerned the cup not the table. The term *terunukwa* makes use of the spatial suffix -*nu*- that refers exclusively to patios. As such, Nana L has used another deictic, topological referential scheme to describe an object that is not touching the ground.

These examples served to display that in everyday lived space, P’urhépecha speakers often deploy frames of reference or topology, both of which convey a similar intrinsic pattern in which the referent is located by means of its ground.

The next subdivision of discursive reference of space involves referents that neither the addresser nor addressee have immediate perceptual access to. The key point about invisible discursive referential acts of location or orientation is that speakers will habitually run along default lines—i.e., a socially relevant entity

(SRE). The addresser often deploys as an SRE a person or place of relevance to their own, their interlocutor's kinship networks. To successfully use this system both speaker and addressee must share background knowledge. If the speaker establishes that the addressee does not share background knowledge, the speaker often relies on place of cultural importance such as a mountain, or church.



Figure 6 Locating an invisible referent through SRE

The typical SRE locates a figure (referent) with respect to a ground (generally someone or someplace important to the addresser's or addressee's kin-based networks). In these instances where the conversation entails locating or orientating someone to some area not perceptually accessible, often because it is distant, then the default means will look as it does in the following example:

1. Axuani Leco, k'umanchikwarhu, jiniani karhakwa isi
Here Leco, house place of there (invisible) up towards
Over there upwards, around Leco's home

The term *axuani* is a deictic denoting an invisible referent nearby whereas *Lecu* is a patrilineal surname, followed by the word for house, *k'umanchikwa*, which is marked with the locative case, *-rhu* denoting place of. The subsequent details provide information about the referent's location as being over there (invisible) in a distant area on an upward slope. The surname would make sense to addresser and addressee as someone either linked to them as a consanguine, affine, or fictive kin. One quickly becomes attuned to this system of locating and orientating invisible referents since it is pervasive.

The following example below consists of a pair of addressers with shared background knowledge (NK and TE) and a pair of addressees who do not share that background knowledge (XP and NT). The SRE thus entails a local landmark.

1. **NK** No mitiskiri, RP?
Do you know RP?
2. **XP** No
3. **NT** No mitiska
I don't know (him)
4. **TE** Notaru irekaksi jiniani
(he) no longer lives over there (non-visible)
5. **NK** Notaru ya?
No longer?
6. **TE** Aleluyecha jaka Diosirhu terutsikuni ka amku jimasi allá jimbo
ketsimani arisi
There near the Protestant church, mid on top of the area, and over
from there, heading downwards like this

An example where both addresser and addressee lack shared background knowledge of common SREs

1. ima nimakwatsʼini ma páspti
him (invisible) grandson to us one take action past third person
He, one of our grandsons, took us
2. jimini Tzintzuntzani jo
there Tzintzuntzan to, yes
yes, over there to Tzintzuntzan
3. yákata jaka xésikiri
yakata being there, seeing have you
where you could see those Yakatas that are there.



Figure 7 Spatial reference: distant invisible referent

An example in which speaker and addressee both lack background knowledge of kinship network links to referent and ground. Speaker uses as anchor *yakata*, structure of importance to ethnic heritage, something that binds all P'urhépecha.

In this section, I teased out the properties of grammatical morphemes and discourse of spatial reference. By highlighting these properties, I attempt to

demonstrate two forms of habituation: one is grammatical and the other is a default of use. The grammatical morphemes possess three properties—unconscious use, obligatory, and polysemy—that force speakers to attend to the world in real-time without much deliberation, which is a phenomenon the literature refers to as “thinking-for-speaking.” In the next section, I discuss the implications of these forms of spatial reference.

2.3 Discussion

Spatial language (SL), a universal characteristic of human languages, consists of the morphemes that encode a referent’s geometric dimensions and location (Landau and Jackendoff 1993). People deploy spatial language while referring to entities; hence, the primary referential function of spatial language is denotative (regarding communicative functions, see Jakobson 1960). It provides an answer to John Lyons’ (1977) two questions: “How do we explain to someone where an object is?” and also “How do we describe the spatial characteristics of particular objects—their extension in space and their shape?”

In the mid-1990’s, researchers directed attention to the language of spatial reference, with particular interest in the cognitive effects of the semantic domains of space. The gist of the inquiry lies in the idea that speakers of a language with different semantic notions of space will possess slight differences in cognitive styles that should be apparent in other manifestations of culture (Levinson 1996). While

much of this work revealed linguistic variation in semantic notions of spaces, some countered that it privileged a system of orientation, Frames of Reference, over other discursive means of spatial reference. Moreover, anthropologists (Keating 2006) argued that language might not always be central to processes of meaning-making in and about space, and that researchers could profit instead from paying attention to a combination of semiotic resources (e.g., language, proxemics, food).

While anthropological insights into meaning-making have proved insightful, there is no account yet of the social implications of the linguistic morphemes of spatial reference. Some studies have attempted to demonstrate linguistic effects on nonlinguistic cognition, thereby proving the validity of the linguistic relativity hypothesis. Following these groups of studies, a closely related hypothesis, the Linguistic Transmission Hypothesis (LTH) (Bohnermeyer et al. 2014) emerged. According to Le Guen (2011) “Language plays a significant role in frame use because speech is an observable behavior that can serve in the cultural transmission of practices of spatial reference, along with other observable behaviors, such as gesture.” Proponents of LTH (Bohnermeyer et al.) posit that “Using any language or linguistic variety—independently of its structures—may facilitate the acquisition of cultural practices of nonlinguistic cognition shared among the speakers of the language.” This view harmonizes with Levinson’s understanding of cognition as “...the intermediate variable between language and other aspects of culture. Thus, we would expect specializations in cognitive style correlated with spatial language to surface in other cultural manifestations.”

Some researchers hold that linguistic structures themselves affect speaker cognition; others claim that the sharing of the linguistic channel makes shared cognitive styles possible. When thinking through the cultural manifestation of spatial reference, the starting point should be a combination of grammatical forms and spatial reference in everyday use. Doing so will provide a real-world context for language rather than an artificially contrived scenario that might prove unrealistic for speakers.

Given the data, two important points need to be made about spatial reference: the obligatory use of body-part suffixes forces speakers to attune themselves to particular spatial areas or body parts. The complex third class of morphemes carry an additional degree of polysemy in that they also refer to psychosocial qualities. The next point is that speakers' default referential practices mimic a part-whole pattern: 1) through intrinsic frames of reference, 2) allocentric schemes, and 3) through SRE's that locate and orient invisible referents through shared knowledge of kin-based people or culturally important landmarks.

It also merits mention that P'urhépecha speakers rely on default spatial forms, not strategic ones. The idea of strategic use of spatial forms conveys an image of speakers carefully planning and choosing words. Instead, P'urhépecha speakers habitually use default spatial forms that express a speaker's intentions in a way that is understood by an addressee. The obligatory morphemes and discursive patterns of spatial reference are habitual practices that are reproduced across interactions with people who share these practices.

In a moment of speech, (either actual situation or narrative), an addressee must describe some action or location then pick a suffix out of a paradigm. One might reason then that choice of suffix evinces strategic deployment. However, this is not the case since P'urhépecha speakers decide to use a suffix within a fraction of a second. Addressees, when presented with a circumstance, draw from their experiences and perceptual access to the geometric properties of the scenario to reproduce default forms. A default form is likely used across individuals in community of speakers, which means it will be quickly understood and reproduced.

In sum, default use is not just a random stab in the dark, semi-predictable because speech usually falls within a radius of uses. Paul Friedrich had discussed the ways P'urhépecha speakers made pervasive use of body-part suffixes in discourse. Yet, studies on the cognitive effects of the language of space presume that frames of reference (as elicited in controlled settings) are frequent if not prominent in everyday discourse. In both everyday discussions and spatial puzzles (where is X?), Cheran's P'urhépecha speakers use a few means to locate entities. Alejandra Capistran's study of P'urhépecha speakers in lake community (through controlled elicitation via ball and chair scenarios) attempted to demonstrate FOR's available to speakers and concluded that topological descriptions and projective FOR's were mutually exclusive in use. Real world utterances in context falsify this conclusion.

2.4 Conclusion

The grammatical and discursive means by which P'urhépecha speakers engage in spatial reference share a single, underlying property—part-whole pattern. While scholars have been quick to view part-whole in the locative suffixes of space, they have not attested for it in everyday use. This chapter has provided ethnographic evidence of everyday spatial language use that displays habitual discursive practices that complement the grammatical locative suffixes. Taken together, these patterns of use are explainable through a few overlapping theoretical approaches to the study of linguistic form and cognition—thinking-for-speaking, the linguistic transmission hypothesis, and linguistic relativity.

While an ethnographic approach to the study of language is not new, there exist virtually no studies that take up P'urhépecha language use in context. Through an ethnographic approach, I was able to show that some of the findings in contrived elicitation settings provide one perspective on linguistic forms, mainly that an FOR cannot coexist in the same utterance with a topological description, that is contradicted by everyday speech. There is good reason for that. People must be evaluated in their everyday areas in everyday situations. These are the ways that they reproduce habitual default practices of spatial reference. If you construct an unrealistic scenario then you will get a description that is likely to only exist in that scenario but not outside of it.

In the chapters that follow, I will consider ethnographic evidence of other cultural practices. If the claims of Levinson, among other researchers, hold

regarding the link between cognitively demanding systems of spatial reference and culture, then one would expect to find cultural patterns that run along similar lines to the linguistic patterns. The linguistic pattern that is described is part-whole. The reader will find a complex system of cultural practices that appears distantly removed from spatial language, but upon closer inspection reveals a similar part-whole pattern.

Chapter 3 Respect

It was a typical *k'arhintá* 'dry' season day as the sun's rays scorched our faces and those of the other inhabitants of the mountainous highlands. My household decided to take a break from the monotony of daily life and descend from the Meseta P'urhépecha towards the ravine region of P'urhépecha territory. We traversed endless curves on our way to *p'orhempini* 'visit' an elderly aunt born and raised in Cheran who married into a tiny, thinly populated P'urhépecha town in that region. After arriving and exchanging greetings, we sat down to talk.

She recounted how her husband's nephew died. She claimed that a shape-shifter called the Mirinkwa murdered him. Her husband sat stoically and took a deep breath. She motioned to him, inviting him to confirm her story. He nodded slightly but remained silent. The deceased party was a recently married young adult, a mason who wasted his meager earnings on booze before supporting his household (a wife and two young children), in that order. The Mirinkwa led him astray into the nearby forest. There he fell into a steep ravine. Days later, the local authorities found his decomposing corpse alongside a gully. As our elderly aunt finished recounting the mason's tragic demise, she said, "You all must have a Mirinkwa up in Michigan too if it is as you say, with pine trees. Sounds just like here. It's just that the folks up there are always indoors, always working in

buildings and their homes, so they never cross paths with it like people do over here.”

This ethnographic vignette highlights how interactions serve as sites for drawing people’s attention to highly ideologized behavior. Across Cheran, people tend to regiment each other in face-to-face interactions that often include intertextual narratives. This chapter examines the interplay between beliefs and interactions, more specifically, how both reinforce sociocentrism. In particular, I review the ways people evaluate each other’s embodiment of sociological characteristics, then use ideological notions of proper conduct and respect while regimenting each other’s behavior. One set of beliefs concerns proper conduct, and another involves the consequences of gendered misconduct, meted out by an evil entity. In both instances, people try to reinforce notions of propriety in closely related but subtly different ways.

This chapter proceeds as follows: in section 3.1, I discuss the importance of *kaxumpikwa* 'respect' to P’urhépecha interactions and then delineate the most salient ideas in subsequent sections. I begin by discussing the various sociological categories a given person can embody, then introduce the ideological notion of *kaxumpikwa* as a means to govern others’ behavior. I will show that Cheran’s sociocentrism governs age-gender categories, essential dimensions of kinship-based social relations. Following these insights, section 3.2. examines face-to-face interactions and intertextual narratives as critical means of reinforcing sociocentrism. People draw from *kaxumpikwa* to regiment behavior. Cheran

P'urhépecha do so by highlighting negative behavior. Section 3.3. synthesizes the insights above while comparing them to a part-whole pattern of linguistic provenance.

3.1 Sociocality and Kaxumpikwa

This chapter deals with the ideological underpinnings arising from linguistically mediated moments of face-to-face interactions. Cheran's inhabitants do not deny the existence of individuality, but they do envision individuals as comprised of kin-based relations (which I will discuss in further detail in chapter 4). In addition, people understand one another as embodying various categories at once, mostly related to gender and age, and prestige or status. I deal exclusively with the former since they factor into most interactions and underlie those occurring amongst folks who embody prestige and status. Thus, the people of Cheran identify a given individual as inhabiting specific categories in accordance with their life stage while also viewing them as tokens of types.

To further probe sociocality in interactions, this chapter considers language use and other cultural practices that are pivotal in clarifying the complex interplay between social reproduction and social transformation (Ahearn 2001). Such a move requires attention to some important sources of interaction, some of which involve entities such as the shapeshifting predator called the Mirinkwa that I discuss later in the chapter, and which scientific audiences would consider mythical and unworthy of serious study. In studies of Amerindigenous populations, some

ethnographers have debated whether Non-Western populations believe humans transform into animals (Harris and Robb 2012). While a postmodern ideology underlies these debates about the sincerity of people's beliefs, the chapter reaffirms a longstanding anthropological approach to ethnographic evidence: that the analyst should attend to the fact that the informants' views carry real-world consequences. In other words, people's ideas about the world produce real social effects.

Indeed, one finds skepticism and rejection of ethnographic fact rooted in ideological notions about modernity that often distort our collective understanding of humanity. For instance, Alan MacFarlane's (1995) review of the French anthropologist Louis Dumont's work explores an idea central to "modern" Western societies: Individualism. According to Macfarlane, Dumont argues that the separation between modern societies from their predecessors is due to the latter's emphasis on the family as its societal unit. In contrast, modern societies emphasize the belief in the primacy of the individual (Macfarlane 1993). In the Cheran P'urhépecha case, we find our coevals who live in a world with cell phones, Facebook and transnational migration, and yet retain their view of a person as being inextricable from their kinship-based networks. Our coevals problematize the view of modernity that attempts to posit the individual's primacy and reject scientifically dubious claims. Whether P'urhépecha elders, who often rely on Facebook or Whatsapp to speak to relatives living outside the community, or tribal members in the Amazon who post on Facebook, our coevals around the globe do not reside outside modernity but are part and parcel of the times. With these starting steps,

this chapter begins to examine the forms of sociocultural underlying interactions in Cheran.

3.1.1 Structural Sociological Coordinates

In Cheran, people generally order themselves by age groups. The elderly population belongs to *yóntki* ‘the past’ and the non-elderly population belongs to *yaasi* ‘the present,’ a dichotomy used by P’urhépecha speakers and Spanish speakers alike. It would appear that people conceptualize speech as placing others into temporal zones, despite cohabiting the same spaces, but this is not entirely accurate. In essence, people are more precisely discussing vibrancy of practice—that P’urhépecha was a vibrant language in the past and Spanish is vibrant in the present. As can be seen, one of the features aligned with this dichotomy is apparent in code use. The older adults speak P’urhépecha, and the younger generations speak Spanish.

Despite speaking different languages, people have the same sociological age-gender scheme as seen below:

	Male	Female
Toddlers and children	Tataka	Nanaka
teenagers	Tumpi	Yuritskiri
adults	Tata	Nana
geriatrics	T’arhepiti	Kutsumiti

Table 2: Age system in P'urhépecha

The Cheran P'urhépecha always consider an individual to inhabit a gender category and an age category. People expect others who inhabit these categories to embody a specific set of social conventions and behavioral expectations. While most P'urhépecha in Cheran are staunchly conservative in principle, they tend to be more liberal in practice. In other words, the stringency of views about proper behavior for age and gender is contingent on the occasion, setting, and people present. People refer to these expectations of proper behavior as *kaxumpikwa* 'respect.'

Kaxumpikwa underlines all interactions in Cheran. People judge others' behavior through *kaxumpikwa*. Even when someone does not embody *kaxumpikwa* because of "bad" or "improper" behavior, another would still evaluate this behavior by referring to *kaxumpikwa*. As an ideological notion, *kaxumpikwa* encompasses in a general sense of proper demeanor. The closest single-word equivalent in English would be 'respect'. There are various ways people conceptualize proper demeanor (such as removing one's hat while speaking indoors, as seen later in the chapter) or giving and receiving respect. People often describe *kaxumpikwa* as proper greetings and appropriate responses, proper speech, and deference towards others without bragging or boasting. For the elderly population, only proper speech through the P'urhépecha language can accomplish respectful displays of *kaxumpikwa*.

In this section, I discussed the sociological categories involved in sociocentrism. Also, I introduced the emic notion of *kaxumpikwa*. In the following section, I show the ways discourse reproduces a group-based sociality in two

principal ways: first as emerging during face-to-face conversations, and second intertextually across face-to-face interactions via narratives about the Mirinkwa.

3.2 Discourse

To claim that the Cheran P'urhépecha display a part-whole pattern of sociality is only a partial claim. One is forced by ethnographic observations to also account for notions of proper behavior, *kaxumpikwa*, and actual behavior in context. As ethnographic evidence shows, people behave in ways that contradict ideological notions of propriety and respect. Nevertheless, they often rely on *kaxumpikwa* to judge one another and claim high moral standing and social status. Furthermore, people across Cheran regiment each other through *kaxumpikwa* as it relates to sociocentrism. They often deploy a detailed exegesis of *kaxumpikwa* for regimenting behavior.

In the first subsection, I show how people across face-to-face interactions can use the ideological underpinnings of *kaxumpikwa* to reinforce moral standards, but also disrupt, even if temporally, social hierarchies. In the next subsection, I show how people draw intertextually from the common properties of a discursive trope within Mirinkwa narratives to explicitly condemn inappropriate male behavior while also indirectly highlighting appropriate behavior.

3.2.1 Face-to-face Interactions

The first discursive site of sociocentric regimentation occurs in face-to-face interactions. Face-to-face interactions in Cheran occur across multiple sites. One of the most common is inside someone's home. The Cheran P'urhépecha, much like their counterparts across P'urhépecha territory, frequently visit one another, a practice called *p'urhempini*. As people *p'urhempini*, ultimately they are displaying *kaxumpikwa*. People understand visiting as a way to maintain good relationships with one's kinship networks, or, conversely, to prevent these relationships from rupturing. People fret over perceived or actual infractions related to visiting. They read into visits respect, and read into a lack of visits ill will or anger. At the same time, they fret about how others will perceive their actions. They must display *kaxumpikwa*. Failure to do so is the cause of much anxiety.

The following analysis takes as its object a multiparty interaction occurring in the *p'urhempini*. The setting is the interior of the domestic compound, in a *troje*—typically a small structure made from long rectangular slabs of wood carved from a tree trunk, somewhat resembling a cabin. There are five people present during the interaction: an elderly married couple consisting of TE [male] and NK [female], a mid-thirty-year-old couple consisting of NT [male] and XP [female], and a married male [RT]. The multiparty interaction begins in front of the *troje*—but since it is now November and the nights are getting longer and colder, the elderly pair ask that the guests join them in their living quarters. Inside their home, the

elderly couple sit beside one another on a bed. They request that their guests sit on small wooden stools and chairs in front of them.

This setup is typical of particular kinds of visits: those involving kinfolk. The elderly male TE and male guest RT are consanguine relatives (i.e., RT's father's mother's brother is TE; hence, TE is RT's grandfather), making the elderly female NK an affine grandmother to the male guest RT. TE works in the mountains cutting trees, planting and harvesting corn, and making wooden furniture or housing supplies to sell. His wife NK has raised their 12 children while attending to all of their home's domestic duties (e.g. cooking, cleaning and sewing). Neither of the two elders received a formal k-12 education, which had only just been introduced to the town during their childhood.

The male guest RT is in his mid-forties, married with children, has a degree in engineering, and works as a mathematics professor at a nearby university for Indigenous students. He is also a second language learner of P'urhépecha. The other two guests, NT and XP, are a married couple. RT is married to XP's aunt, her consanguine relative (i.e., XP's mother's grandmother's cousin's daughter, which in local kin reckoning makes her an aunt). Thus, RT is an affine uncle to the other two guests. Kin visit kin. People across town are connected through kinship (consanguine, affine or ritual) ties or friendship networks.

The interaction, then, is a token of a visiting scenario involving an intricate web of kin relations. The couple was expecting all three people to visit and anticipating the opportunity to discuss life in Cheran. Before continuing, it is worth

noting that P'urhépecha people do not allow their everyday conversations to be recorded. The few elders who agreed to recordings only did so if told in advance what the topic would be, and how long the discussion would take. Even then, some grew uncomfortable with a recording session. There is good reason for this that I hope to explain in this chapter! The example below is instructive about the underlying social dynamics at play in any given exchange:

- 1 NK: p'intsī inte kátsikwani pári inte úni xarharani ampe
 remove that sombrero from your head, so that it
 shows
- 2 kátsikwani p'intsī
 the sombrero remove it from your head
- 3 {joint laughter}
- 4 TE: hijo-
 dam-

TE begins speaking, but in line 1, NK interjects with an imperative. The utterance starts with the verb root *p'i-* 'remove' and the derivational locative suffix (of the body-part class) *-ntsī-* 'head.' NK follows with the demonstrative *inte* meaning that the speaker and/or addressees have visual access to the referent which is *kátsikwa* 'hat/sombrero' marked as an object with the suffix *-ni*. The grammatically obligatory use of an optional spatial suffix on the initial verb in the imperative is consonant with the setting: body part suffix *-ntsī*. All parties at this point are inside the troje, but TE still has his sombrero on his head (as opposed to on his lap or in his hand), which is an act that the two elderly P'urhépecha speakers

recognize as improper conduct, in other words it is not an instance of *kaxumpikwa*. Moreover, NK's utterance serves two important functions: 1) she regiments her husband's behavior in front of their guests, and 2) she pedagogically demonstrates *kaxumpikwa* to three younger people by exposing her husband's error. Both functions require further elaboration.

The joint laughter in line 3 should be understood within its particular context and cultural milieu. In particular, all participants recognize that the utterances are the equivalent of checkmate in a chess game. One individual has outmaneuvered another to the extent of ending that exchange. Socially it is much more complicated. It is a momentary transference of conventional wisdom. A wife establishes authority over her husband in front of guests, kinfolk at that. She points to an essential P'urhépecha social custom and demonstrates that her husband was acting contrary to it. Such a move, which simultaneously undermines sex/gendered statuses grounded in kin relations (post-marital patrilocal residence, men as authorities over their spouses), is seen as subversive yet clever—all laugh. TE laughs because he recognizes that his position as a patriarch for RT, master of his spouse, and general authority as host in his patrilineal home to his younger guests has been undermined. Further evidence of this is found in line 3, where his response *hijo- 'damn...'* cuts off (the Spanish term *hijole* is a means of expressing surprise similar to the English damn.)

In the subsequent utterance TE attempts to salvage his standing in the interaction:

- 5 TE: como éska na arhiskachka ya sáni kaxumpitani ya /ano/?
 like, how to say it, show a little respect, right?
- 6 XP: /aja, de quitarte el sombrero/
 aha, to remove your sombrero
- 7 RT: jo
 Yes
- 8 NT: kaxumpikwa
 Respect
- 9 TE: ka respetarini isi ya
 and respecting
- 10 NT: jo
 Yes

TE's utterance in line 5 is at once recognition of his wife's one-upmanship but also of the ever-present ideas governing social life in Cheran. It is a collective idea that others readily appeal to when judging each other's behavior. In line 6 XP seconds TE's utterance as being a valid statement that captures the essence of social life, and in line 7 RT says *jo* 'yes.' In line 8 as NT says the word *kaxumpikwa* TE starts to describe an active process of respect by describing it in the infinitive form *-ni*. TE dwells on respect because, in a sense, what just happened demonstrated a lack of respect for his guests and his wife's lack of respect towards him. He does not display anger or aggression and is saving himself from any more negative evaluations of himself.

In the next exchange of utterances, TE and NK vie for position with one another:

- 11 NT: entonces asi se muestra el respeto? Jo

so then, that's how one shows respect? Yes

- 12 TE: jorhenhape/ntarini inte /
taught me, that
- 13 NT: asi se muestra la kaxumpikwa?
that's how one shows respect? {TE laughter}
- 14 NK: nori (unintelligible) p'i katsik par úni...
respectarikhini
you don't (unintelligible) remove hat to show
respect for oneself (others also implicit)
- 15 XP: uuuuu

NT's question in line 11 is met with an indirect response that occurs in a dyadic moment between TE and NK. TE turns towards NK in line 12 then says teaching with the demonstrative *inte* referring to kaxumpikwa. Neither respond directly to NT's questions in lines 11 and 13. However, NK in line 14 repeats her initial imperative, only this time she does so with an additional derivational suffix *-kurhi-* that emphasizes reflexive action. Hence, it is not also a lack of respect for one's guest, as she initially stated, but ultimately also a lack of respect for oneself.

TE accepts this affirmation while adding more context to the utterance:

- 16 TE: yontkinti ísi jánhasirempti ka (slight pause)
in the past, it was like that and
- 17 XP: uu huuu
- 18 TE: inde ka (pause) respetariperanhani (pause) eh
that and mutual respect between parties eh
- 19 ka no nema wantani este arhini ya,
and nobody speaks that now,

20 inte antisī ísī p'iki káts'íkwa inte antisī p'iki katsíkwani /no/
that, why remove that sombrero, that's why remove
sombrero, nope

21 NK: /no?/

22 TE: respectarini jo
respecting yes

TE harks back to the past in line 16, yontkinti, the normative state of affairs differed from the present. One can infer that this is romanticizing on TE's part. Hill found that discourses of respect corresponded with certain class groups. However, the elderly generally see things this way for various reasons.

23 NK: arisinti
he/she says
na chúsku ya
how's your evening?/good evening

24 TE: jo jo
yes yes

25 NK: o nátsi erant/iska ya,/
or how is your morning?/good morning

26 TE: /jo jo/
yes yes

27 NK: tsipepirinka ya
if it was the morning

28 TE: según na jantoreepirinka éнка tsípeepirinka ya nátsi erantskusiki ya?/
/ka tsípeni sáni ya
according to what time of the day, if morning how was your morning?
And a bit lively

29 NT: /nats erantskuski/
how was your morning?

30 TE: ka xatini ya na chúskusiki ya na chúskusiki ya isisti

and in afternoon, how is your afternoon, how is your afternoon? That's how it is

31 ísī je
 like that

32 ka isī jámani ya
 and that's how it is carried about

33 nirani jarh/ani mátaru mátaruni jink/oni/
 to be going, with another another

34 NK: /ka isī jámani/ /ísī jámani níntaxati ya/
 and that's how it that's how it's carried about

35 TE jo
 yes

The underlying idea guiding these utterances is reciprocity. TE demonstrates in line 30 that P'urhépecha speakers respond to each other with proper greetings on the right occasions. The statement provides an example of a code-based view of linguistic exchange. That the younger generations do not share the P'urhépecha code only means that they are unable to reciprocate. In both senses, P'urhépecha speakers evaluate the younger generation's status as being beneath their own—interestingly enough, P'urhépecha speakers from other communities hold the same views. They will often consider monolingual Spanish speakers beneath them in terms of local status, although they hold them in high regard if not of P'urhépecha origin. This then might suggest that to be P'urhépecha is to speak the language because it enables one to reciprocate, and, most importantly, engage in *kaxumpikwa*. In line 34, NK's statement concerns reciprocal actions that are carried out perpetually. TE affirms.

NK will go on to discuss status in the next few utterances as being grounded in language use and identity:

- 36 NK: ninhantaxati ya ísì jámani ya nóteru wáninhaat'i ya,
 they are leaving, they are no longer many
- 37 tarhasikweechaksì nóteru waniiti ya
 the tarascans, they are no longer many
- 38 p'orheecha
39 p'orheecha
- 40 NT: p'orheecha notarhu taraskwecha
 p'orhepecha no more tarascans
- 41 NK: puro turhisiit'i ya yásì ya,
 pure turhisi they are now
- 42 NT: aa /turhisi jimpo
 in turhisi (Spanish)
- 43 XP: /uuu humu/
- 44 NK: máruksì no kurhantisinti ampe ísikuksì
 some don't understand how things are
- 45 isì ampe wandaki
- 46 esos así dicen mis nietecitos {Xara laughter}
 those, my grandchildren say it like that
- 47 abuelita abuelita que estas asi hablando pero no entendemos
 grandma grandma what are you talking like that but we don't
 understand
- 48 pendejos que no entienden {loud rising laughter from Xara followed by
 laughter from RT, joint laughter}
 idiots who don't understand
- 49 NT: notarhu kurhanhsinti
 they no longer comprehend
 chátsì cha jimpots'isì kurhankwaka p'orhe ka

jimpots'isī kurhankwaka p'urhepecha jimpots'isī yámintu jási ampe
kurhankwaka
no andan diciendo feo
ustedes que dicen ya
You all should understand p'urhe and because by understanding all of
p'urhepecha, you'll understand and they will not disrespect you'll, what
do you all think

In line 44, NK admonishes a general group of Spanish speakers who do not speak P'urhépecha. In line 45 she starts voicing this group, using her grandchildren as a concrete example. This is a profound critique on many levels. Whereas NK initially directed her comments towards TE, she now engages in more visceral acts that defy kaxumpikwa and reciprocity. In doing so, she clarifies that one's own family is not exempt from being judged. The fact that one of her grandchildren, RT, is present and largely quiet except for the occasional laugh should not be overlooked.

The P'urhépecha proponents of a discourse of nostalgia associate the past with respect and the present with a lack of respect, respect being intimately tied to P'urhépecha language use. Moreover, the fact that P'urhépecha language use corresponds to being P'urhépecha (a view that transcends sex, income, and social status) is worth pondering. It is a discourse of nostalgia pushing back against Spanish monolingual encroachment (which entails disrespect and loss of ethnic identity).

I now turn the reader's attention towards a few examples of Cheran's discourse of nostalgia. Similarity and Difference #1: In Cheran P'urhépecha's Discourse of Nostalgia, the elderly distinguish between P'urhépecha speakers and non-speakers without evaluating purity of language or lack thereof. Code use

distinguishes between past and present, P'urhépecha and T'urhisi. Consider the following example that involves Nana K, an 80-year-old speaker of P'urhépecha, a mother of 10 children, and married to a corn farmer/woodworker who is a former womanizer and drunkard.

In this first interaction, Nana K and her husband Tata E have been discussing in P'urhépecha how to make a type of tamal and kamata (atole). She briefly breaks into Spanish.

Similarity and Difference #1

1. Nana K: tamarindo bien bonito antes, ahora le echan color
and tamarind, before it was very pretty, now they (young ladies) add
artificial coloring
2. R: p'urhe jimpo abuela
in P'urhépecha, grandma
3. Nana K: p'urhe jimpochkakinisï arhini jaka
I'm telling you in P'urhepecha
4. no t'u turhisï k'amets'ï
no, you're a t'urhisi sour head.

In line 1, Nana K draws a contrast between the past and present. In the past, women knew how to make tamales and kamata (atole) with proper ingredients that produced the desired color. In the present, they rely on artificial coloring. This demonstrates one facet of the discourse of nostalgia (reverence of the past). In line 2, R (Nana K's 40-year-old grandson) interjects by requesting that she speak in P'urhépecha. Nana K's response in line 3 must be understood in the context of the entire interaction. Nana K spoke almost exclusively in P'urhépecha. She refers to

her grandson as a T'urhisi 'non-Indian' because he is a monolingual Spanish speaker, and his conduct—interrupting an elder and questioning her speech – is considered inappropriate.

We find two interesting points arising from this example: 1) the past is good and the present less so and 2) certain forms of interjections receive negative evaluations. Both of these relate to *kaxumpikwa*, or “respect.”

Similarity and Difference #2

Yóntki anapwecha ‘those from the past’ demonstrate *kaxumpikwa*. They employ the code and understand how to properly interact with people of different ages and genders across social contexts. Consider another of Nana K’s interactions where she discusses proper forms of greetings that must be used according to the code of the *yontki anapwecha*:

5. Nana K: *na chúsku ya, jo o nátsi erantiska ya, según éska na jantoreepirinka Énka tsípeepirinka ya nátsi erantskusiki ya ka tsípeni sáni ya*
good afternoon yes, or good morning, according to the time it is if it was morning, good morning,
6. Nana K: *ka xatini ya na chúskusiki ya na chúskusiki ya isísti*
and the evening, good evening, good evening, that’s it.

In lines 5 and 6, Nana K is demonstrating the proper greetings between people in P’urhépecha. In line 5, Nana K uses a Spanish word within a P’urhépecha phrase, demonstrating that the elderly do not ideologize language purity, but rather the

code itself. This elderly woman considers the dialogue to be in P'urhépecha rather than T'urhisi, so a Spanish word does not matter.

Their focus on P'urhépecha language use and its social implications is exemplified in a few more instances below.

7. Nana K: *ninhantaxati ya ísī jámani ya nóteru wáninhaasti ya, tarhasikweechaksī nóteru waniiti ya p'orheecha, p'orheecha puro turhisiit'i ya yásī ya, máruksī no kurhantisinti ampe ísikuksī isī ampe wandani*
they're leaving there aren't many more, the Tarascos, there aren't many more, many more P'urhépecha, nowadays there are only T'urhisi, now, some don't understand anything, they just talk
8. Nana K: *chátsī cha jimpots'isī kurhankwaka p'orhe ka jimpots'isī kurhankwaka tarasco jimpots'isī yámintu jási ampe kurhankwaka*
that's why you should understand, understand P'urhépecha, you all should understand Tarasco and understand it all.

In line 7, Nana K is bemoaning language loss. The shift towards Spanish signals not just a shift in code but a loss of identity—P'urhépecha are now replaced by T'urhisi. T'urhisi do not know P'urhépecha; hence, they do not practice *kaxumpikwa*. They do not understand anything.

Yet, Nana K does find herself reasoning that there might be hope in line 8. She switches between referring to the language as P'urhépecha and Spanish. P'urhépecha speakers always refer to the people and language as P'urhépecha unless they are speaking Spanish! We find then that respect is intimately linked to the past. A time when all understood the P'urhépecha code, employed it correctly in greetings, and in doing so the past consisted of P'urhépecha. Yet, even the *yási*

anapwecha ‘those from the present’ can learn to understand P’urhépecha and learn respect. Nana K herself recognizes this in line 8.

3.2.2 Interdiscursive Tropes: *Mirinkwa*

The second site of sociocentric regimentation occurs through *Mirinkwa narratives*. The word *Mirinkwa* is comprised of a root denoting to forget and a morpheme *-kwa-* that turns a roots to a noun.

Mirinkwa
Mirin-kwa

The P’urhépecha’s *Mirinkwa* narratives are based on everyday, personal experience: they are not scary traditional folk tales. Cheran P’urhépecha elders deny knowing any stories and do not share narratives that are equivalent to the popular conception of the term “story”. It is probable that the term *wantantskwa*—often cited as a translation for the word “story”—is a neologism for written stories. People often discuss the *Mirinkwa* in any given conversation, usually in the first or third person. No cultural prohibitions govern the topic.

According to the P’urhépecha, the *Mirinkwa* is a malevolent entity that takes the form of an attractive woman. The *Mirinkwa* deceives its drunken male victims by temporarily erasing their sense of time and place. The *Mirinkwa* then lures its victims towards ravines so that they fall into them, which often causes their death. Hence, the malevolent entity alters its appearance to prey upon males.

The Mirinkwa narratives are more likely to arise when somebody has claimed to encounter it, knows of someone who claims to have encountered it, or following someone's death. A victim may convey his experience, or some party might describe a living or deceased victim's experience. In sum, the P'urhépecha narratives about the Mirinkwa are descriptions of particular events (like, for example, someone's personal experience planting corn). However, analysis reveals that there exists a pattern of elements within these narratives that are common to most people's experiences.

In what follows, I will evaluate three different discussions about the Mirinkwa. Through this analysis, it should become clear that the Mirinkwa narratives share common properties. It should also become clear that people deploy Mirinkwa narratives to highlight unsavory male behavior, which is an indirect means of referring to *kaxumpikwa* and a form of social regimentation.

The case involves an interview with an elderly male 1 in his place of business within the town plaza. Elderly male 1 is a medical doctor whose clients are often other older adults residing in and outside Cheran and families from outside Cheran who speak the P'urhépecha language. In this conversation, we began discussing the Mirinkwa. The case displays a few familiar tropes.

Elderly man (1)

1. mataru miringua inde miringua indenga jindesti nanachi ma sesi jangaringa ma, nana jo, sesi jangarisiti
another mirinkwa, that mirinkwa another it is, a pubescent female, a pretty one, a female yes, a pretty face

2. este, urapingarin jaka eska jawirichaia isi charapitiia jaka, este, hmm, isi ka xararasinga meni jaman jauak como kawiri kawin ambe white faced with red hair, hmm, that way, and, it appears moving about to a drunkard who is drinking
3. ne isi uandakuesti jinde miringuaresti someone said, that's the Mirinkwa
4. miringua jurasingya del verbo mirikurini ka mirikurini he castianapo jimboya este mirikurini olvidarse olvidarse mirikurini ka mirinkwa jindesti ya ne jamakya petamachatchaya ka este mirinchichya como perderse isi xasï xasï uandakuesti
Mirinkwa comes from the verb mirikurini and mirikurini in Spanish means to forget, to forget, and mirinkwa it is, someone who has been taken out, and hmm forgotten, lost himself they say

In line 1, the elderly male describes the physical attractiveness of the Mirinkwa.

The term *jangaristi* makes use of the facial morpheme *-ngar-* in describing the entity as attractive. Elderly male 1 adds further detail by describing the Mirinkwa as a teenage female.

Further along in line 2, elderly male 1 describes the physical characteristics that mark the Mirinkwa as desirable: white face and red hair. It should be noted that both characteristics differ drastically from the average P'urhépecha's appearance. Across Cheran, people possess a phenotypic appearance more closely associated with Mesoamerican Indigenous people: darker complexion (copper) and black hair.

In addition to describing the Mirinkwa as an attractive female, elderly male 1 begins to highlight the predatory nature of Mirinkwa in line 2. He mentions *kawari kawini ambe*, a drunkard who is drinking as being its victim. The Mirinkwa appears habitually before these individuals as noted in the use of the morphemes -

sinka- that denote habitual action. The Mirinkwa, then, is an entity that moves about, causing drunken men to follow it.

The elderly male is somewhat atypical of P'urhépecha speakers since he has studied the grammar of the P'urhépecha language and actively reads. The two behavioral traits combine such that he engages in an explicit discussion about P'urhépecha morphemes. In line 4, he points to the fact that the very name Mirinkwa denotes forgetfulness. The Mirinkwa habitually appears before drunken males, then cause them to forget. This forgetfulness inflicted upon males is a means of losing themselves.

The next case involves an elderly male 2 more typical of the average inhabitant of Cheran. He spent much of his life as a logger cutting trees in the nearby mountains. In his explanation of the Mirinkwa, he describes it as something terrible that fools men.

Elderly man 2

1. no sési jási, no sési jásipti ima, sési jánhatapka juáni, úsinti jamperi nanaka ma xéni, no sési jási ménterhu
an evil entity, that was an evil entity, convinced him that he saw a teenage female, and then once more it is an evil
2. máteru jarhastiksi, xarhakwaasinti tsiweritiichani,
figurariichintikini ma sési jási ma ya nanachi ma ka juánkini ya axuasí ya ka xurukuni p'eranchka ya,
there are others, it appears to males, they see a female with a nice figure, it brings you here and leaves you here (near the town's outskirts with ravines)
3. ménteru mirinkwa ya, no sési jáchka ya, wánikwaksi wantani no ixu chiiniti jimposini arhika ya éska mirinkwa inte jinteeska ya mirinkwa ya no sési jási énka isku júpka jiniasí

once more it is the Mirinkwa, an evil thing, many say this isn't your home (since they lose their senses) that's why I say it's the mirinkwa, an evil entity that brings people here (to the outskirts)

In line 1, elderly male 2 describes the Mirinkwa as “*no sesi jasi*” an evil entity.

While he affirms that men see the Mirinkwa as a female “*nanaka ma xeni*,” he also points out that its true nature is that of an evil thing that can change appearance.

In line 2, he notes that the Mirinkwa appears to males. The gendered dimension carries implications across the board. In the first instance, males are attracted to females. An entity with a female appearance is an evil force that can lead a male astray. Of course, one must recognize that the victims are generally drunken males.

Across lines 2 and 3, the elderly man 2 emphasizes that the Mirinkwa leads men astray not just morally but literally. Men are taken from the town to the outskirts. One can reason then that this evil entity breaks men down from a more civilized, tempered state into a more primal state of lust. One falls into a state of loss because of the underlying notions of *kaxumpikwa* being proper speech and conduct. Males who abuse alcohol and are drawn to attractive, younger females behave not as civilized P'urhépecha but as brutes whose only endpoint is outside the community, figurately and literally.

While the cases so far have examined narratives related by males, the following case shows how the Mirinkwa narratives can also be shared by females. They add an extra dimension to these intertextual narratives because they are from the female perspective. In the following case, elderly female 1 recounts how one of

her male relatives met his demise through the Mirinkwa and how her husband also encountered the Mirinkwa.

Elderly female 1

1. ji ka jatsispkachkani ma imani juchi primuni warhiti ya, ka imani mirinkwa páspti ya, si no ima ixu kawaru pénkachka inchanhimka ya
I had, a cousin of mine, who is deceased, and the Mirinkwa took him, it here in the middle of the gully that it took him.
2. sési jántinhasptichka ya Jimposi ima meni nireemti ya ka ixúnha teruterunhipani teruterunhipani ya ka imachka ampantskakupani no sési jási ya ka páni ya jiniasí nanintisí peeraspi ya
he was doing good, for that reason he was going, and here in the gully, inside the middle of the gully, inside the middle of the gully, the Mirinkwa took him dragging him, it was here in the gully where it took him inside
3. ka méni ístu ísí niraspti Don C ka jani kawini jarhani ka en vez de ixuani ísí junkwani ima jiniani ísí nirani ka jiniani ísí jámani yawani ísí ya
once, Don C also went that way, over there far off he was drinking liquor, instead of returning home he went off there far away
4. ka ménteru ixueni ísí junkwani ka janonkwani ya ka ixu íchantani
then he returned home, he came back
5. ka jítuchkani no nirasíramka este erontani jimpoka ja no sesi jamsímka imat'u atani wékani ka imanisíni cherhiimka ka no nirani ya
and I was not going to hmm wait because he was very bad and he wanted to hit me, I feared him so I didn't go to meet him
6. mirinkwachka jimposíni arhika jawani no sési jasítichka inte mirinkwa ano the Mirinkwa, well that's why they say it is evil, that Mirinkwa
7. no ampakititi inte éнка ísí pápka porque ísí wena anti tata diosikini jimesí wekanhanta sino que inte no ampakitini ya enkakini pákachka ya ka ísí jimpokini ampantskachipani pakini úni páni,
it is evil since it takes them that way, why the dear lord doesn't throw you away there? If not because it is evil, and it takes you, and cleans its path, so that it can take you
8. ka jiniasíri jámani ya miántani nóteruri úni jawaka junkwanchka ya, joperhu inte xántku ísí jámasptichka ya no ma ampe ma úkustichka pero nomachka revolcadusí junkapti ya sóntku perentskantkata, jo ísí jápti

and over there, you will forget, and you won't be able to return home, that's how he was but it didn't do much to him, he just returned a bit roughed up, that's how it was.

Elderly female 1 expresses two perspectives: first that of a relative of a deceased victim of the Mirinkwa in lines 1-2 and second as the spouse of a survivor in lines 3-9. In line 1, we find those drunken men are discarded in gullies. As the reader may recall, the opening vignette also made this point explicit. Similarly, elderly man 2 pointed to the site of harm as occurring away from the town—tacitly confirming that one will be harmed near the gullies. Line 2 describes the male victim as being dragged further inside the gully to his death. It is also a means of expressing how the man was “doing good” *sési jántinhasptichka* but became deeply involved in improper behavior such as alcohol abuse, which took him further along away from the town.

As a spouse, elderly female 1, expresses her fear of her drunken husband. This differs from the ideas conveyed by males. Males do not express how these episodes affect other people related to them. This narrative discusses how females are frightened by drunken behavior, such as violence and incoherence. While elderly female 1's husband is able to return home in line 5 he is injured. This injured spouse is also described as violent in line 5. A male who becomes a victim of the vice becomes a victim of the Mirinkwa. Such a victim cannot find his way home as expressed in line 8.

In line 8 we find the opposite of *kaxumpikwa*: one can use *kaxumpikwa* as a good path, but to flout these social conventions leads people astray away from their

homes. The homes and towns are sites of kaxumpikwa. The gullies are sites of moral decay and death. A male, such as the elderly female's husband, can survive by obeying kaxumpikwa. To do so would mean returning home, that is to say, to follow the path back to proper behavior as understood through kaxumpikwa.

These various cases all highlight the shared properties of Mirinkwa narratives. People express these narratives as recounting real-life incidents. In this way, they are similar to one person telling another about how they might have crossed paths with a squirrel, deer, or a neighbor. People sincerely believe in this evil entity and in the veracity of these narratives. They do not view the shared intertextual properties across these narratives as undermining the legitimacy of these beliefs. Cheran's P'urhépecha understand these narratives as conveying something fundamental about the world. They express them also as a means of disparaging negative behavior, which is ultimately a means of trying to tout the merits of proper behavior, kaxumpikwa or respect.

While this section has dealt with the ways people regiment sociocentrism in face-to-face interactions and with intertextual narratives, the following section incorporates all the preceding information to provide a detailed picture of the similarities between linguistic part-whole and sociocentrism.

3.3 Discussion

P'urhépecha regiment each other through face-to-face interactions and discourse in circulation. In instances of face-to-face intimacy, individuals police others through explicit notions of kaxumpikwa. Often expressed as deeply rooted

respect, the elderly P'urhépecha rely on shared notions of proper conduct to evaluate each other.

As found in these interactions, people can undermine preconceived notions of sex-based hierarchies by appealing to *kaxumpikwa*. For instance, married couples consist of males and females, which carries an understanding of a male's authority over his spouse. However, females can disrupt these conventions by pointing out how their husbands misbehave, or flout shared social conventions. In doing so, females use *kaxumpikwa* as a powerful tool for regimenting the behavior of individuals who have authority over themselves.

Elderly P'urhépecha speakers often use linguistic competence in the ancestral tongue as a means of evaluating another individual. The ability or inability to speak P'urhépecha carries implications for how people understand others' mastery of propriety. In a way, the dichotomy between those who master P'urhépecha speech and those who don't is crystalized in emic notions that at first glance carry temporal implications: *yóntki anapwecha* 'those from the past' vs *yási anapwecha* 'those from the present'. However, what Cheran's inhabitants understand by these terms is more akin to manipulation of verbal speech. The elderly thus builds on this to claim that they are more capable, if not solely capable, of displaying genuine respect. Despite these dichotomous views of respectful and unrespectable people, people across the board are liable to display a lack of *kaxumpikwa*.

Another means of social regimentation occurs in terms of *Mirinkwa* narratives. In these narratives, we see that sociological characteristics correspond

to certain forms of behavior. Men are more likely to become drunkards, gallivant, and lose their footing within the community. However, although women are less likely to commit these infractions of social conventions, we find that the predatory evil entity named Mirinkwa takes on a female form. Nevertheless, people are explicit that despite resembling a female, the Mirinkwa is neither male nor female but rather just an evil entity.

In addition, an analysis of kaxumpikwa narratives reveals an inherent native exegesis concerning the role that kaxumpikwa should play in how one comports oneself. The combined effects of this exegesis and explicit social regimentation in interaction produce various social effects. In both of the main sites discussed in this chapter, people refer to kaxumpikwa. They do so by highlighting improper behavior. In face-to-face interactions, people explicitly state that someone is not abiding by kaxumpikwa. In narratives, they display behavior that is leading them to their possible deaths by flouting social conventions. The type of regimentation occurring in interactions can equally apply across the board. Individuals of any sociological category can deploy kaxumpikwa to point out another's fault. One example focused on an elderly female's use of kaxumpikwa. Another showed a form of social control that is strictly applied to men. Women never fall victim to the Mirinkwa: the Mirinkwa never takes the shape of a male.

Cheran's group-centered vision of sociality is a key aspect of social relations. People are only understood as individuals by way of categories that correspond to others and through relationships with others. In this sense, the notion of ordering

people's behavior so that they fall in line reveals an active means of enforcing group-based sociality. Rather than positing a rule similar to a computer code that people mindlessly follow, what is found is that people must put in much social work to achieve their aims. They understand how things should be ideologically but behave in ways that differ.

P'urhépecha speakers discursively reproduce a part-whole sociality as they regiment individuals. Monolingual Spanish speakers do the same. The difference between the two groups lies in code use, which adds a layer of regimentation and status.

3.4 Conclusion

Through the analytic evaluation of interactions, one understands social control as an active process occurring between various emic sociological categories. As individuals engage with one another, they monitor each other based on certain categories each inhabits and through shared notions of respectful behavior or *kaxumpikwa*. Females can deploy notions of *kaxumpikwa* to undermine social hierarchies in the emerging properties of interactions. At another level, both females and males reproduce intertextual linkages concerning improper behavior in *Mirinkwa* narratives. As people highlight unsavory behavior, they are tacitly drawing from and highlighting proper behavior, *kaxumpikwa*.

To understand that an entity named the *Mirinkwa* can cause drunken men harm, and in some extreme instances death, is to make a step towards the question: what must one's understanding of the relation between social relations and the

world consist of? In other words, what are the social properties at play when people share these narratives? Bronislaw Malinowski recognized that explaining away such phenomena in no way accounts for their effects in anthropological terms. Whether or not we agree with our informants, the social fact remains that in their worlds such entities have a bearing on their activities. It draws analytic attention to the Cheran P'urhépecha's understanding of individuals as inextricable from a complex web of kin-based social relations. Kinship networks are explored in further detail in chapter 4.

Chapter 4 Kin-based Social Relations

Many of the townsfolk across Cheran view Don Chatarra as a vexatious troublemaker. I spent much of my time with him at his homestead. During our time together, I came to understand not only why people consider him irksome, but also why people hold him and his relatives in low regard. Upon first meeting Don Chatarra and his kinfolk, I was unaware of their reputation. At times he appeared level-headed, pleasant, and sociable but little by little he lapsed into sporadic episodes of grumpiness. I attributed these behaviors to his age, given my previous experiences with other elderly people in the area. These behaviors, in my eyes, likely explained why people disliked Don Chatarra. However, one interaction set into motion some events that helped me understand the true reasons why people disliked Don Chatarra. Through these experiences, I came to understand why people made generalizations about individuals, and why they attributed individual behaviors to kin groups. In sum, these events helped clarify the nature of kinship dynamics in Cheran.

While sitting on the curb of a street near the mountain, which is called *Kukuntikata*, Don Chatarra and I encountered another elderly man who lived nearby. The two elders exchanged greetings, then began chatting about current local affairs. The coincidental meeting between the two seemed mundane. After

they finished talking, Don Chatarra and I returned to his house, where his spouse and two unmarried daughters were awaiting us with food. When we sat around the cooking hearth to eat, everyone present began talking about things that had happened during the day or their plans for upcoming events. Don Chatarra, for no discernable reason, switched the topic to the elderly man we had met on the street earlier.

Don Chatarra said, “That guy *Campeon* ‘champion’ says he visited Tijuana then took a taxi all the way up to North Carolina. I asked him while looking him straight in the eyes if he made it to the North. He told me that of course he did. I was shocked because he doesn’t have his immigration papers. Do you know what he said? ‘It’s easy. They say it’s hard to make it up North, but it’s so easy. I was in North Carolina within a day or so!’ That’s what he told me.” Don Chatarra then looked at me and said, “You speak to him often enough. Is this true?” From what I had gathered in my interactions with *Campeon*, I was unaware of his trip to the U.S. and unaware of him claiming that he had made such a trip, which seemed impossible since he did indeed lack papers. Before I could answer, Don Chatarra responded, “No, huh? Oh well, he is such a liar, a liar and a miser. Did you know he owes the cheese vendor a nice chunk of money? I overheard it myself.”

Weeks later I visited *Campeon*, who was seated with his spouse outside their home enjoying the sunshine. We spotted Don Chatarra walking by with his old, white burro. He exchanged a friendly smile and quick greeting. The elderly couple smiled, then as Don Chatarra walked away leading his burro down the road to his

home they digressed from the topic of our conversation—concerning the P'urhépecha understanding of things as signs—to briefly discuss Don Chatarra's origins. Campeon asked his wife, "Where is he from?" Nana L responded, "He is an orphan. A member of the Y house. That's his surname. From what I recall, I think his mother was of X and his father was of Y, of the Y house." Campeon let out a quick giggle, then said, "It figures," while shaking his head as if feeling shame for another person's misfortune. These remarks located Don Chatarra in the lineages. It was the understanding that Don Chatarra belonged to these lineages that caused Campeon's giggle and display of slight shame for his elderly counterpart. In this brief exchange, the elderly couple inadvertently set before me a quick diagram of kin reckoning, and also a quick display of how people understand individuals as types of kin-based tokens in Cheran. Moreover, Don Chatarra's case highlights the kin-based dimensions of sociocentrism in Cheran. It is a way of tracing the social consequences of the sociocentrism in larger scale phenomena

This chapter contributes to scholarly knowledge about sociocentrism in Cheran by demonstrating how kinship relations as being pivotal for larger scale behavioral phenomena. To thoroughly grasp Cheran's sociocentrism requires analysts to pay attention to kin-based relationships. Networks of kin groups make possible the organization of larger scale events. Among the Cheran P'urhépecha an individual is always situated in a complicated web of kin relationships with people around the city. An individual is comprised of paternal lineages from the father's and mother's sides of the family that take the form of dual surname households. I

argue that reciprocal exchanges between parties across kinship activities, such as socially locating individuals and marriage rituals, reproduce a pattern similar to part-whole. These reciprocal exchanges between parties enable cooperation at micro and macro scales of interaction.

The chapter develops as follows: in the first section, I explicate the status of the family among the Cheran P'urhépecha. The family, consisting of paternal lineages along the mother's and father's side, is always the means by which people understand each other. These insights prove pivotal for the processes of kin-based reckoning I discuss in the second section. In the second section, I describe a means of detecting Cheran's kin-based sociocentrism through the ways people ascribe type-level stereotypes to individuals and token-level stereotypes to groups of people. These similar processes lead to notions of understanding people as being inextricable from their backgrounds. I also explicate the realm of ritualized behavior via wedding ritual sequences that involve reciprocal exchanges between kin groups. The pattern of reciprocal exchange is also crystalized in ritual drunkenness and labor. The third section describes a pattern of reciprocal exchange in a simulacrum of a wedding ritual that involves a temporary fusion of distinct kin groups. I then demonstrate how a kin-based framework carries repercussions until and after death. Females, who retain membership in their paternal lineages, despite residing with their spouse's paternal family, are buried among their spouse's paternal kin.

4.1 The Family

The following section further develops an understanding of sociocentrism through the cultural domain of kinship, more specifically, the discursive construction of kin generalizations and the ritualistic activities in the fusion of familial lineages through marriage. In doing so, I start by exploring the P'urhépecha notion of the family. I posit that the family is the central unit of P'urhépecha social relations. To understand what the P'urhépecha mean by family is to get a better grasp of social relations across the community.

Cheran is a Juatarhu community that has attracted considerable anthropological interest (Beals 1946; Castillo 1974; Molgora 2004), but few if any studies have focused on kinship dynamics in the community. Of the few scholarly treatments that deal, if only indirectly, with kinship, the philosopher Jacinto Zavala (1988) comes to mind. He provides a detailed account of the sequence of rituals that culminate in a marriage; however, his account is undertheorized. He does not explore the relationship between these rituals and everyday social life. Another recent study is that of Ramirez Herrera (2009) whose ethnographic fieldwork dealt with alleged notions of *siruki pani* 'antecedents.' She analyzed the genealogies of three families, which according to others in Cheran possessed negative antecedents, to find that people do indeed hone in on actions that are deemed undesirable. However, I was unable to find any evidence for the notion of "siruki pani" in my own research. Out of all the many P'urhépecha speakers to whom I spoke, not a single

one had ever heard of the term. It was a foreign notion to them. It is likely that someone had coined a neologism when speaking to Ramirez Herrera, or simply misled her with inaccurate information about a nonexistent concept. However, the gist of her claims concerning the power of discursive depictions of individuals as possessing negative antecedents is certainly attested for, as I will demonstrate later in the dissertation. In another study, Casimiro Leco Tomas (2009), a P'urhépecha born and raised in Cheran, investigated the cultural and economic challenges faced by his fellow townsfolk who migrated from Cheran, Michoacan to Burnsville, North Carolina. The study reveals kin-based cultural continuity even among the U.S. born and raised offspring of P'urhépecha migrants.

One of Leco's fascinating points, relevant to the purpose of this chapter, centers on family life. Native-born migrants from Cheran, despite residing in predominantly White neighborhoods in the United States, are not merely advancing their socioeconomic livelihoods, but they are doing so while maintaining crucial kin networks and replicating the yearly social practices—fiesta rituals, marriage rituals, reciprocal exchanges—that constitute their social lives. Thus, although the desire to support their family entices young men to travel north in search of employment so they can send monthly remittances back to their loved ones in Cheran, people remain intimately connected to their families by lifelong bonds despite the great distances that separate them.

In the anthropological literature researchers have closely scrutinized analytic concepts of the family. Bender (1967) demonstrates the efficacy of analytically

separating the family, household, and domestic functions. These distinctions are partially useful, but ultimately not completely applicable to the Cheran case. I will address what has been an often-overlooked question, save for the new kinship studies approaches that emphasize emic understandings of relatedness: How do the P'urhépecha inhabitants of Cheran conceptualize and identify the family? One possible route to answering this question is through a close analysis of the P'urhépecha language itself. An important part of what it means to be a speaker of a given language is knowing not only its kinship terms, but just as importantly how to use them and the social responsibilities that sets of relations entail.

Consider as an illustrative heuristic an American English speaker's use of kinship-related terms. Upon analysis we find that speakers of this language can apply the term "family" to a domestic unit or an extended group of siblings and first cousins. Moreover, American English speakers might naturalize the fact that their language employs a single word to describe these groups while assuming that speakers of other languages also use a single term whose referent is identical in form and function to the American English word "family". It goes without saying that this folk theory of the relation between word and referent is flawed.

Anthropologists have long ago exploded the notion that the composition of the family is the same across cultures. These two points are worth bearing in mind when considering how the Cheran P'urhépecha describe the notion of family.

In the P'urhépecha language there is no particular word that denotes 'family.' What we find instead are two options, a single term that denotes a house, such as

Quata, or a phrase that combines a few words as in the case of *marku k'umanchikuarhu anapuecha*. In both instances, a speaker of P'urhépecha must use the term house. The phrase below demonstrates that P'urhépecha speakers perceive the house, the central living unit of a group of relatives, as central to describing the family:

marku k'umanchikuarhu anapuecha	
same house from/of	<i>word for word translation</i>
'Of the same house'	<i>literal translation</i>
'The family'	<i>free translation</i>

One can trace this lexical-semantic match back to the 16th century (Friedrich 1984; Monzon 1996). An analysis of the formal properties of P'urhépecha kinship terminology and its use reveal a hierarchical household dynamic. There are two underlying gradients: gender and age. Whereas in pre-contact times there were specific kin terms used to describe the elder male and female sibling (Garcia-Mora 2013; Monzon 1996; Vasquez Leon 1992), currently, P'urhépecha make no such distinction. They do, however, adjust their kin terms depending on the person they are speaking to. The terms exchanged between kin are contingent on each person's gender: e.g., a male ego will refer to his brother as *erachi* and his sister as *pirenchi* whereas a female ego will refer to her sister as *jingonikwa* and her brother as *mimi*. The table below shows these gender differences in kin terms:

Tata K'eri	Grandfather	FF, MF	Jinkonikwa	Sister	Z (f.s)
Nana K'eri	Grandmother	FM, MM	Mimi	Brother	B (f.b)
Tata	Father	F	Pirenchi	Sister	Z (m.s)
Nana	Mother	M	Erachi	Brother	B (m.b)

Table 3: Kinship Terminology in P'urhépecha language

While kin terms can suggest hierarchical relationships, anthropologists review observable behavior and emic notions of those behaviors to establish the case. What remains of the 16th century system are gendered sets of kin terms that, in everyday social life, are applied with the understanding that certain family members are authorities in certain spaces. In a given house it is the senior woman who presides over the domestic spaces such as the kitchen. This point is worth considering in the context of post-marital residence patterns—given that socially across Cheran there exists an age hierarchy, males bring their wives over to live in their households where, generally, there is already a senior woman residing. While age and gender appear to comprise the core of social relations, there remains another angle from which to understand exactly how people constitute their lives: lineages via surnames.

The P'urhépecha exhibit a cognatic pattern of bilineal descent. An ego is related to the patrilineal kin of his father's side and mother's side (hence the father's paternal surname and the mother's paternal surname). The house then is generally a living space shared by patrilineal kin and their spouses. Most often, men marry then live with their wives for an indefinite length of time with their

parents in the father's paternal property. When females marry, they go to live with their spouse in his father's property. Sons continue to live with their parents, and daughters with their in-laws, until they move out into their own property.

However, this property is often still part of the paternal inheritance, unless of course a mother has property that she can share with her children.

Houses, then, potentially consist of three generations: founders (parents), offshoots (offspring), and descendants (grandchildren). This is a general trend. One can also find larger families residing together on a single property. This follows the same pattern already mentioned, just with more generations. These households that are unable to expand into other property lots tend to be more impoverished. The figure below displays the patterns of patrilineal lineages that exist through surname identifications:

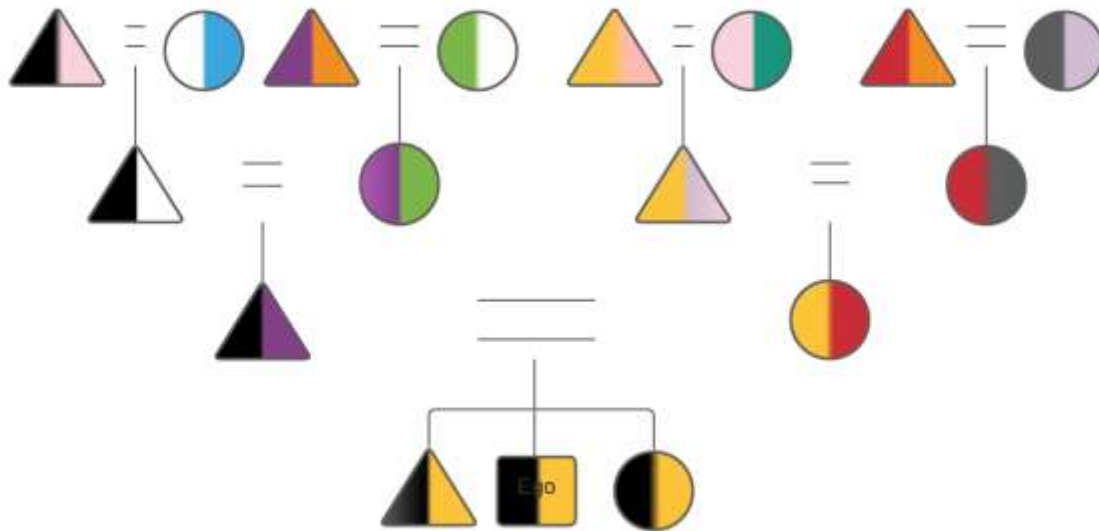


Figure 8 Patrilineal Kinship Diagram

As one can see, an ego will possess two surnames. My experience among the P'urhépecha is that they can deploy this dynamic to their benefit—which means they can avoid obligations outside their two paternally-derived lineages by asserting their sole membership in two lines. For example, an older male once told his wife, “My last names are G and V, nothing more. If another person is not G or V then he is not my relative and I don't know him and don't owe him any reciprocal exchanges.” She shook her head and laughed. It was slightly playful since he would not owe reciprocal work to others outside his paternal lines more than a generation or two back. The family thus is comprised of patrilineal lineages in an immediate household. This household is linked to others of the same surname forming kinship groups. These kinship groups prove important for larger scale ritual events, which is something I will elaborate on later in the chapter.

In kinship studies, scholars have found it profitable to distinguish between descent and relationships (Murdock 1940). One can descend from a lineage or two while maintaining relationships with individuals from other lineages. In this way, the Cheran P'urhépecha are formally members of paternal lines while also (depending on the household and relationships between members) maintaining relationships with maternal lines. This latter phenomenon does lead to an interesting dynamic that gets muddled across generations.

Sometimes people will consider each other relatives without really knowing how the link exists. Some people will refer to each other as relatives despite not sharing a surname. For instance, on two separate occasions my wife and I

encountered women who claimed to be her relatives. One woman selling blouses from a makeshift stand in front of her spouse's paternal home asked my wife about her house. When my wife shared that information, the older woman replied that she knew her family, and that they were relatives. My wife asked her surnames, but neither of them matched her own. It was then that the woman said that as a child her father had encouraged her to refer to my spouse's maternal grandmother as her aunt. The link between my spouse and the old lady was hidden behind surname lineages. Such cases serve to demonstrate that certain conditions such as a parent or grandparent sharing a surname can be an impediment to establishing ties between older generations and younger generations whose surnames differ. These types of relationships largely consist of greetings that are mostly free of implications for reciprocal work or other kin-based obligations. In the next section, I will discuss the discursive and ritualized views of families.

4.2 Discursive and Ritualized Kin Actions

The following section evaluates discursive and ritualized kin-based action: the ways people discursively ascribe generalized kin behavior to individuals and families and the often coerced reciprocal exchanges occurring throughout wedding rituals. By examining discourse and behavior, I seek to draw attention to the parallels between kinship dynamics and the allocentric and part-whole patterns.

P'urhépecha people reproduce the underlying unifying patterns of discursive and behavioral kin actions across daily affairs and ritual events.

4.2.1 Discursive View of Kin Relations (Locating Individuals)

In Cheran, people discursively depict individuals and groups as part and parcel of generalized kin characteristics. For example, I ran into an acquaintance, an elderly woman I'll call Nana Ma, who lived next door to an affine kin member of mine from the same barrio, *karhakwa* 'up'. She told me she was heading to the town's administrative center to complain to the local authorities about a family I'll refer to as X. Nana Ma said, "They are no good, lousy thieves. Don't let them borrow money because they won't repay. They have money, so that's probably how they got it, by being dishonest, money grubbers who lie and steal and rip off other folks." Nana Ma's anger seemed to be directed toward an entire family, yet she was only interacting with a single member of the surname lineage X. She thus constructed that individual as recapitulating a generalized type.

Nana Ma's example shows that people portray an individual as recapitulating family traits. The example is one in which the individual was marked as a token of a type, which incidentally she described as highly undesirable. It is doubtful, if not logically impossible, that Nana Ma had met and closely observed every member of a single nuclear household bearing that surname, let alone every member of lineage X. Yet, Nana Ma generalized about the lineage, and discursively projected a

prefabricated negative view of the lineage onto an individual. Such a discursive move is commonly used around Cheran. People are often quick to point out the faults in others.

Along with negative generalizations, Cheran's inhabitants also generalize positive evaluations onto individuals, although less commonly. When people make positive evaluations, they are quick to do so when discussing members of certain families deemed honest, hardworking, or quiet. These are the folks that actively display and embody *kaxumpikwa*. One can reason that because *kaxumpikwa* is ideologically a property usually restricted to P'urhépecha speakers who embody proper speech and behavior, it is easier to just point out flaws. It also serves the social function of pointing out flaws for the purposes of denigrating another or diverting negative evaluations from one's self or family. Whatever the reasons, people can discursively ascribe negative generalizations about a family onto an individual, even if they don't often do so.

Thus far, I have discussed type to token generalizations, but people also ascribe individual behavior to kin groups. Consider one type of type to token generalization. Often, the P'urhépecha will perceive an individual's drunken binges or aggressive behavior in a deterministic manner. As households gather around the kitchen hearth to share meals, they might discuss recent events. Such discussions occurred on numerous occasions in which people attributed an individual's behavior to the group. The pattern follows this structure: the individual, Juan G, is a member of the "Santiago" patrilineage. Juan G is a rowdy drunkard who sows

discord and disturbs the peace. He is like that, so all Santiagos are predisposed to behave in such a manner. They are like that. As can be seen in the generalized pattern, people deploy the token to type discourse in a similar manner as the type to token pattern.

While thinking through the ways people in Cheran identify individuals as recapitulating kin or groups as possessing traits displayed by individuals, it helps to consider emic conceptualizations of kinship dynamics. From an emic perspective, the people of Cheran view individuals as intimately tied to their kin groups. The link between an individual and a family is inextricable. One cannot exist as an atom who makes herself or himself independently of background. When someone encounters an individual or an individual is brought up in conversation, others generally explain that individual's behavior as recapitulating a family trend. It is quite common to find people explain this dynamic along the lines of "they are like that." The "they," generally, refers to the house ergo nuclear family, which in turn, often reflects the patrilineal lineage.

The aforementioned kin dynamics make sense when considering folk views of the town's composition. Most people claim that they all know each other. The elderly restrict themselves by qualifying their statements along the lines of "I know those of my generation but not younger folks (of various generations)." Even this statement might be an exaggeration. Cheran has a population of over 20,000, so any claim to know every individual person, or even just the members of one's own

generation, is highly unlikely. But if individuals are grouped into families, then this claim becomes more credible.

The two patterns of kinship generalizations constitute intratown kinship reckoning. The pattern can also be applied to intertown kinship reckoning. However, when people attempt to identify someone from outside Cheran, they generalize based on towns instead of different family surnames. Consider another example from Nana Ma. She recounted how her daughter had become involved with a married man from another town. Nana Ma said, “So I looked him dead in the eye. I grabbed the machete and ran towards him slashing away. He bolted towards the wall, jumped and climbed over. I swung and missed, hitting the wall. I yelled out that we don’t accept already married men in this house. I received word that he had a spouse in another community. And more rumors spread that he had another female, a lover, with children in another town. That’s how they are from his community, a bunch of shameless liars. The whole lot of them!” In addition, people from other towns may be described as being quick to violence, others as prone to excessive drinking, and others as humble to a fault. This is not simply a matter of generalizing a town, as if the town was comprised of unrelated people, but of viewing in a town as a group of surname kin groups who are ultimately inextricably linked to each other.

4.2.2 Ritualized Behavior

In this section, I will discuss rituals related to marriage. Through marriage, people establish reciprocal bonds between households. Among the Cheran P'urhépecha there are two forms of marriage rituals: *sipapini* 'elopement' and *kurakuerani* 'arranged marriage'. By entering into these marriages, people are judged as either practicing *kaxumbikua* or flouting it all together. The couple that seeks marriage is already aligning itself with patrilineal lineages with certain antecedents, and each individual's actions thereafter can serve as the standards by which others will judge them, and also ascribe those behaviors to their relatives. Further description of Cheran's main marriage style, *sipapini*, will clarify these points.

In contemporary P'urhépecha communities the most frequent form of marriage ritual is the *sipapini*, which is a form of elopement in which a young man and young woman conspire to wed. Once a couple has agreed to wed one another they will stage a mock kidnapping, such as the male taking the female to his house, or they will simply walk together to the male's home. The Cheran P'urhépecha consider this event as very important. The young couple is making the transition from youth to adulthood. The other marriage ritual, *kurakuarani*, is a form of arranged marriage in which the man's family will visit a woman's household to ask for her hand in marriage. There is no guarantee that the woman's family will agree to the proposed marriage. Still, once an agreement is made between the families it seems that these rituals follow through until the marriage is consummated.

The peculiar attribute of both these rituals is that they were very well documented in the 16th century. The historical record shows that at this time most marriages were primarily a matter of arrangement between families. However, these days most of Cheran's younger generations are married through elopement. The elopement pattern of marriage has become the de facto marriage style since it is much easier to accomplish. One can obviate the need for help from one's kin group to ask for a female and the risk of being rejected by the female's parents. The elopement strategy also provides young couples with a greater degree of agency in making a fusion between kin groups possible.

When a marriage takes place there is a basic dynamic at play: a male becomes a *wampa* 'husband' through a *tempuchakwa* and a female becomes a *tempa* 'wife' through a *wampuchakwa*. When referring to a wedding from the male's perspective, as the male's kin group often does, people use the term *tempuchakwa*, which is a way of emphasizing that someone is appropriating a female. The opposite holds for the female's kin group when discussing the *wampuchakwa*. The newlywed couple resides in the spouse's paternal home for an indefinite period of time prior to moving into a new residence, which is often also part of a paternal inheritance of property. In this way, males remain with their paternal kin and females circulate among paternal households. The same dynamic holds when people intermarry between P'urhépecha towns. It is common to find males in Cheran bringing a spouse from another P'urhépecha community; likewise, a female

from Cheran who leaves the community to reside with her spouse's household in another town.

Below I will provide an ethnographic example of the events occurring immediately after a young couple decided to sipapini, the *perdon* 'forgiveness.' People refer to this ritual visit as forgiveness because the male's family seeks to offer its sincere apologies for the elopement, and to receive the female's kin group's forgiveness and approval for the male, who is by extension a representative of the kin group itself.

It was getting dark outside. We were sitting near the kitchen hearth drinking tea and keeping ourselves warm when we heard a phone ring in the house across the courtyard. An older, unwed female answered the cordless phone then walked over to the kitchen, saying, "Yes, we are here. Grandfather and Grandmother are here. What's so important? Ok I'll tell them. Everyone will wait for you to come over." That was the full extent of the conversation. We continued talking about other matters, until half an hour later the young relative of my elderly host approached the kitchen with his female companion. I was unaware of what had transpired, nor did I know what was about to happen. The elderly man, however, surmised from the conversation that something important was afoot. Once he saw his grandson, a young man about 20 years of age, approach, he inferred that he had made a step towards becoming a married man.

The elderly man asked his grandson, "So you stole her?" By "stole", he meant they had eloped. Across P'urhépecha communities, much like other communities in

rural Mexico, people refer to an elopement as stealing. The P'urhépecha term, sipapini, is also the term for stealing. This appears to be a common Mesoamerican way of describing this marriage style. He repeated his question since he wanted his grandson to acknowledge what had taken place rather to remain silent: "Did you steal her or not? Let us know since we will have to visit her household. Should I visit them?" The grandson remained silent, not even nodding or shaking his head. His eyes looked a tad watery. At that point his grandmother interjected, "Oh son, you have no courage!" With that, the young man finally nodded his head to confirm he had eloped while staring down at the floor. His grandfather said, "All right then. Let's get ready."

Within a matter of an hour, the elderly man's household had contacted his kin. We stopped by a liquor store to buy bottles of liquor and cases of beer, along with cigarettes. The women bought ribbons to wrap around the bottles. We traveled over to the young woman's home and were met by other members of the kin group. They, too, had brought bottles of liquor and cases of beer. The elderly man then walked over to the door, with us behind him, and knocked. A woman answered the door, and called to the recently eloped young woman's father, who approached the door. The two men shook hands. They began talking. The young woman's father's eyes grew watery. He beckoned us into his home, shaking all our hands and greeting us, then motioning us into the living room. The other people of the house came to greet us too. At this point they began calling other members of their kin group, who came to the house. We drank and talked the entire night.

Members of the young man's party tried to ease the young woman's father's pain. Her family was sad because she would be leaving their home and joining another.

As representatives of the young man's kin, we handed the bottles of beer and liquor that we had brought to the young woman's kin. They then began distributing the beer and liquor, establishing a reciprocal exchange between the kin groups. All parties must drink. In such ritualistic encounters nobody remains sober. People will continue talking and drinking until all the liquor is finished. We carried on like this until the early hours of the morning when the sun began to rise. Such is the perdon in Cheran.

The elopement leads to the perdon 'forgiveness', which ultimately leads to a sequence of wedding rituals occurring across three days. On the first night, the male's family and the female's family engage in a reciprocal exchange of clothing. There are processions for both sides, in which kin groups are accompanied by bands of musicians around the streets. These two kin groups meet together in front of the female's house, where she has been "hiding", ritualistically "find" her, then bring her outside. From there, people will sit together—the male's family together on one side and the female's family together on the other. As the music continues to play, females from the female's group will dance while carrying embroidered cloth napkins and females from the male's group will dance while carrying miniature statues of bulls. After each dance, they exchange these items, thus reproducing the initial exchange that occurs—the female's family providing the male's family with clothing for the female and vice versa.

On the second night, the couple is wed in the town's church. The bride's family walk in a procession to the church and the groom's family do the same. After the wedding ceremony, both parties form a joint procession towards the reception area, which in the 1940's would more often than not occur in the groom's backyard but during the period of my research usually took place in a rented hall. Cheran is much more populated than it was in the 1940's, thus even a large rental hall gets packed with guests. Another potential place to host the reception is a street. I attended such a wedding too. The wedding reception is the site of various exchanges and a fusion of in-laws, fictive kin and godparents.

Throughout the marriage sequence, as with many of Cheran's ritual events, there are two patterns of ritualized coercions. In any given event, people will ritually oblige others to drink liquor. In the same way, people will oblige those in their networks to partake in exchanges of labor. In marriage sequences, one can neither escape being forced to drink liquor nor providing someone with labor. I will elaborate more on these two ritualized coercions below.

During a life stage event fiesta such as marriage reception there occurs a reciprocal exchange/interaction between dyads or among multiparties. In fact, there is potentially a hierarchy of reciprocal exchanges. Consider that the fiesta organizers carry out reciprocal obligations to each other. For example the *compadres* 'godparents' and their *ahijados* 'godchildren' at a wedding. From there the *compadres* more or less recruit invitees from among their kin network (consanguine, affine, and fictive) and friendship ties.

The parents expect the compadres to carry out their duties: to be physically present, supply certain economic goods and food stuffs and provide labor (indirectly through their ties, bonds of kinship and friendship). If these duties are carried out they are a source of goodwill between these representatives of families. If not, there is potential for various repercussions (rumors, aggressions, failures to fulfill one's duty to help out when needed,) and of course all that comes from *brujeria* 'sorcery' Sorcery can then cause various forms of misfortune (loss of opportunity, loss of money, bad health, bad luck, and even death (in other words, much hardship, stress, fear, etc.)

So, in principle, compadres carry out their duties, they fulfill the expectations people have of them, and reaffirm their reciprocal bonds to each other at individual levels (very apparent at first glance, but also at familial level—the latter may not be made explicit, but it follows given the cultural circumstances and precedents set in Cheran and other P'urhépecha towns). This is one level. It still entails the main individual or family calling upon various others (compadres, kin etc.)

The next level is those individuals who have been called upon to then call upon others. Let's say, for example, that the groom has a compadre who invites own folks to the wedding. Invitations can occur by way of a formal visit from the inviter's household (the godfather and godmother) to the invitee's household (partner, male and female) with the hopes of catching both at home. This is difficult to do since everyone works and inviters (even at the second level) have so many households to visit, which is time-consuming.

So, partners exchange greetings, shake hands and talk. The inviters then converse and explain that they will be at such and such's wedding since they are compadres and would like them to accompany them. The male inviter hands a cigarette to the male invitee and the female inviter gives a *concha* (shell-shaped piece of bread) to the invitee. They might talk some more, confirm the dates, then part ways.

The invitees now must prepare themselves for their roles. They will bring to the reception a few items: the males bring a box of cigarettes and a bottle of liquor and the females bring long, brightly colored ribbons. The male invitees arrive and shake the male inviter's hand, then provide him with the cigarettes and the bottle of liquor (which might also be adorned with a bow). The male inviter then receives the bottle and cigarettes and places them on spot on table. The cigarette boxes may be stacked very high, visible for all to see at their table, together with the bottles of liquor. The female invitee hands over the ribbon and in exchange she gets a piece of bread of a specific design. She then places the long ribbon in the female invitee's hair, so that her whole head might be covered in brightly colored bows.

With these acts the godparents have fulfilled the first part of their duties. The godfather now can drink without worries and eat. However, there is more to come. He will then call upon his invitees to distribute the bottles of liquor. The inviter just picks bottles at random and asks an invitee to serve others drinks. The inviter hands over a bottle of liquor and maybe some soda. This is why many invitees in this role arrive with a *sutupu* (a bag), so that they can carry the bottles

more easily. It is difficult to carry the bottle of liquor, cups, and bottle of soda by oneself, even with the sutupu, so sometimes the invitee performs this task with a partner, or with a friend, or someone he himself invited, even a child. For example, my wife and I were invited by R, the godfather of the bride, to her wedding. We brought him a bottle and sat with him and his spouse at their table. Then after a certain point he then passed me a bottle, cups, and soda. I had brought my son along, who was five or six years old at the time, so he held the bottle of soda for me, and sometimes the cups.

The invitees now walk around from table to table, and either ask if someone would like a drink, or just go ahead and serve them. People generally either smile nervously and say “Not now,” make up an excuse such as “I am taking medicine,” or “I am sick,” or just say yes. Some say yes hesitantly, and may even seem annoyed, whereas accept it cheerfully. But without exception, those who accept say “*Acompáñame*,” ‘Accompany me’ and will even start to argue with or taunt the server if he serves himself less. This means that the invitee has to drink each time he serves someone. In an attempt to delay the onset of inebriation, some invitees will serve large groups of people all at once and then take a single drink.

Yet, despite their best efforts, the servers inevitably get very drunk. And some in attendance get very drunk too, with all the usual symptoms of falling, tripping, slurred speech, funny dancing, and sometimes vomiting or passing out. This then is the reciprocal bond between two kinds of invitees, one kind called upon by a compadre to distribute (or redistribute) liquor and spread drunkenness, and

the other kind who consumes the drinks, or devises strategies to avoid doing so. (Women in particular come up with ingenious ways to avoid drinking too much. I witnessed women appearing to drink what was in their cups, but then discreetly spitting it out in a planter, on the floor, or in one case a receptacle hidden in her blouse.)

This shared activity creates reciprocal bonds between invitee and invitee, invitees and invitee, invitee and invitees, and invitees and invitees. The invitees bond through these actions as part of the festivities, forming a whole that is part of a greater whole.

The labor for a wexantani begins a few days before the actual wexantani. If you are responsible for providing the corn, you must shell it. People in Cheran store corn from the preceding year's harvest, which eventually becomes rock hard. It requires a great deal of effort to shell. The shelled corn is stored in bucket or bag. Once all the cobs are shelled (filling maybe 10-12 sacks) the women then begin to "pelar nixtamal" boil the kernels in a huge pot (or sometimes two or three pots). Someone watches over the nixtamal for several hours. After this the grains are removed from the water and rinsed to remove the skin, and then the grains are placed in buckets. The process of gathering the cobs in sacks, shelling them and filling the pot with kernels can last from the afternoon to the evening, while the boiling and rinsing can take all evening and continue until the early hours of the next morning.

The next step is to awaken at 3:00 a.m. to gather the required tools (baskets, buckets, corn husks and corn leaves for the tamales, and utensils), which are all taken to the mill. The person at the mill will begin placing the corn grain into the machine while adding water so that it produces corn dough. The dough is scooped little by little into the empty buckets. Because of the additional water, the dough is heavier than the original corn grains. Larger buckets (sometimes three or four) are carried by men accompanying the women, generally their husbands. With big buckets full of corn dough, they make their way towards the area hosting the wedding reception. There they will start fires and the women will begin cooking.

When it comes to distributing food, the men serve as waiters, taking plates of food to guests. They also deliver tortillas and tamales to tables for the guests. The people involved in *wexantani*, ritualized reciprocal labor, will also engage in their own micro-ritualized drunkenness. They will distribute beer among themselves and also shots of liquor. In doing so they are fully aware that they are participating in labor that will be returned to them in the future. Without this labor, they will be unable to perform their own wedding rituals. The whole process only works when people participate, and they generally do so.

On the third day, the two kin groups reunite for the famous joint outing to a local spring. Before heading off, they each fulfill separate duties. The male's kin group brings bottle of liquor and the female's kin group brings food. The male's kin group serves members of the female's kin group drinks, which, by virtue of being ritual drinks, means that both the person serving drinks and the person being

served will drink together. The female's kin group will distribute food to the male's kin group. Aside from exchanging liquor and food, people will listen to music and dance. They will then make their way together as a procession towards the spring. They will gather water in buckets, then begin playfully throwing it at each other. All through the procession to and from the spring, the male's relatives will pour drinks for the female's relatives. With these events ends the rituals that bring two families together.

Reciprocal Exchange

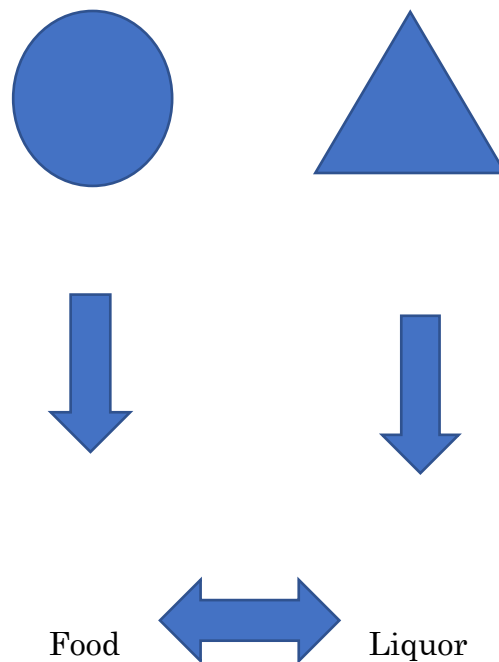


Figure 9 Reciprocal Exchange between Male and Female kin groups

In the next section, I will describe another ritual, tumpi jueces 'young male judges' that reproduces the reciprocal exchanges already described, and briefly describe how kinship dynamics affect burial plots.

4.3 Simulacrum and Death

A *Tumpi Juez* is best described as a simulacrum wedding consisting of exchanges between the households and kin networks of a teenage unwed male and a teenage unwed female. Church officials chose a number of young males, or *tumpi*. The *tumpi* chooses girl, called a *yuritskiri*. A *tumpi* is usually an unmarried adolescent, but the term is also applied to unmarried adults in their 20's. Cheran is similar to other P'urhépecha communities in that many people wed at a young age (sometimes even in their early teenage years).

The *tumpi* must choose a female companion for the festivities. This is a decision that he makes in conjunction with his household. Together they will decide against one girl because her family is a certain way, against another because the boy doesn't get along with her, and so on. It is another example of events that involve families and require family-level decisions. When the family has finally settled on which girl to invite, the boy must personally invite the girl, and she will tell her family.

The boy's male kin will now need to venture into the neighboring forest to select a tree, cut it down, make it into a log by removing the branches, and bring it back to the town. The boy needs to recruit his kin members for this project, so that they will accompany his household and help them bring the festivities to fruition. The closer members will help to procure the tree. The females of this household will be busy cooking food.

I was invited to participate in the expedition to find a suitable tree and bring it back as a log for a tumpi. On successfully completing our mission we drank a lot of beer, and were drunk by the time we returned to eat. After eating, everyone gathered to visit the girl's home. In doing so, we were paralleling the visits one pays after an elopement during the perdon. Since the young lady in question was supposedly bathing when we arrived, we had to wait outside the house for about half an hour. The girl's household also recruits their kin to help them during the rituals to come: these people were already assembled in the house's courtyard. As the boy's household entered in single file with gifts, we handed them to the girl's household. We then shook hands with each other and left.

As daybreak approached, the households got to work. Everyone in the boy's household assembled. The women were busy cooking for all. The men threw themselves into decorating the large, heavy log (that required at least eight people to carry it) with crates filled with fruit. Meanwhile the girl's household was busy building and decorating a large V-shaped structure that carries cloth napkins (like those exchanged in wedding ceremonies) and male clothing. This structure stands nearly two stories tall and requires more than ten men to hold it upright with ropes and sticks. When both parties were finished, everybody met near a street called Ocampo that leads to the town center, and the two groups exchanged their outsized gifts.

The boy's kin group had contracted a local musical group, an orquesta or banda, to play music during the procession into the plaza. The musicians played for

the boy's kinfolk while we were decorating the log, and then played for everyone as the two groups made their way to the plaza carrying the log and the V-shaped structure. There were many households engaged in these reciprocal exchanges between male and female. They were lined up awaiting the moment to proceed towards the town's center.

The fusion between male and female kin groups is evident in the town center. All the groups participate in ritual exchanges of liquor, the males are together exchanging liquor while the females are also exchanging liquor and dancing to the music being played by the bands. The male-female fused groups attempt to advertise their social status by contracting the best bands, making the most noise, dancing longer than other groups, and carrying the largest, most visually impressive V-shaped structures and decorated logs. This ritual is clearly an exchange of symbolic genitalia. The male household provide the female household with a phallic symbol and the female household provides the male household with a vaginal symbol. It is similar to the logic of tempuchakwa and wampuchakwa. Such exchanges and fusions between households entail consequences for people even after their death.

Since marriage causes the circulation of women in P'urhépecha society, one can find evidence of this practice's effects in the cemetery. Burial plots contain clusters of graves of relatives possessing the same surname, with one exception to the rule. A female's grave will have a different set of surnames if she was the wife of a male member of the kinship group. Because females circulate between

households and do not alter their surnames, their surnames will differ from the paternal surname shared by most of the other individuals in a burial plot.

In this section, I showed how people reproduce patterns of reciprocal exchange in various activities. The ritual mock wedding follows the underlying pattern of reciprocal coercion found in weddings. And one of the implications of married life is that a married woman remains with her spouse's kin even after death, while retaining her surname. In the following section, I will incorporate these insights along with those from previous sections to further elaborate on the patterns of part-whole and sociocentrism.

4.4 Discussion

The purpose of this section is to explicate the ways that sociocentrism underlies the domain of kinship. Furthermore, this section will show the similarities between kin-based sociocentrism and part-whole and allocentric patterns. P'urhépecha kinship practices resemble allocentric and part-whole patterns from micro to macro levels.

As seen in section 4.1., in Cheran an individual is a member of a kin group consisting of increasingly larger-scale networks of patrilineal surname lines from both paternal and maternal parents. Through ethnographic research, this chapter has provided insights into the social consequences of patrilineal bias of kin relations in Cheran.

To exemplify the implications of these insights, I draw from a case example of a female ego, S.B.P. S.B.P. was raised exclusively by her mother and had little to no contact with her father and his kin. The table below illustrates through S.B.P.'s case how an individual links to larger-scale networks of paternal kin.

3	E.U.N.
2	A.V.U.
1	C.P.V.
0	S.B.P. (Ego)

Table 4 Paternal biases in kin reckoning

The example further expounds on the implications of the kinship diagram in section 4.1. S.B.P. identifies with surnames P, V, and U, and participates in reciprocal exchanges with members of these lineages. As can be seen in the table, all the surnames S.B.P. identifies with are from her mother, her maternal line. The details in the table are equally applicable to her siblings (children of the same M). S.B.P.'s mother's paternal surname is P and her maternal surname is V. S.B.P.'s grandmother's paternal surname is V and her maternal surname is U. Finally, S.B.P.'s great-grandmother's paternal surname is U and her maternal surname is N.

Even in nonstandard circumstances such as S.B.P.'s—raised by a mother without the father—in which she identifies more closely with her mother's kin, a paternal bias appears. At first glance one might consider this to be a case of maternal bias that contradicts the claims against paternal bias in kinship

reckoning. However, a closer look reveals a paternal bias. S.B.P. is ultimately identifying with surname lines that run paternally through her mother's kin. People align with paternal lineages on both the father's and the mother's sides.

Others thus project generalizations onto that individual based on the paternal line. Someone might observe an individual's actions, then create a generalization that they apply to other kin members with that surname. Also, people are more likely to engage in reciprocal work on behalf of paternal lines (even if at first glance these surnames seem maternal, they are likely upon closer inspection to reveal a paternal provenance.)

An individual is associated with his kin group. People associate individuals with kin by evaluating behavior or ascribing group behavior (real or imagined) to individuals. 1) Someone ascribes a generalized view of a lineage's behavior to an individual of that group or 2) someone ascribes an individual's behavior onto the family or lineage. The two processes are related but different. In the first scenario, someone might already be familiar with various members (various generations) or rumors about a stock, but unfamiliar with the observed individual. In the second instance, someone might be unfamiliar with the stock, but more familiar with the individual. Among the P'urhépecha, a person displays individual traits (e.g., personality, dislikes, speech) but is conceptualized as recapitulating kin-based patterns of behavior.

Consider as an example the case of *La Asesina* 'The Murderess', who belongs to a family known as being unfit for married life. *La Asesina* has a few daughters,

some of whom have had children, and some of whom have been married and then remarried. People consider these individual situations to be typical of the family as a whole. They view this kin group as incapable of maintaining a stable married life. When her daughters were returned to her, even if not at fault for their spouse's infidelity, people viewed the returned women as recapitulating a family-level behavior. There is a sexual undertone to it, with a tacit understanding of permissible and impermissible sexual behavior. Males can sleep around and still get married, sometimes more than once, however, females should not sleep around—if they do they are considered tainted and thus less desirable marriage prospects.

People are not limited to ascribing negative token-level behavior to groups or negative group-level generalizations to individuals. They do the same with positive behavioral characteristics. Some families are considered breeding grounds for *kaxumpitis* 'people who embody *kaxumpikwa*'. Other families are considered moderate, levelheaded folks who seek to maintain good relations with people and avoid negative encounters. Some are seen as honest people and hard workers who avoid excessive drunkenness. And others still are portrayed simply as happy people.

Most of these behavioral responses can represent more than individual traits. People read these as kin-based and project them onto kin groups (sometimes restricted to a household, at other times extended houses, and sometimes across the surname lineage). At a network level, scale could be anywhere from a household to

a lineage. In this way, people's behavior displays a part-to-whole organization and people's ideas reflect an underlying part-to-whole pattern.

In kin reckoning, the patrilineal surname lineage would be the whole, and the individual the part. Thus, people who spread rumors about someone's behavior are attacking both that individual and the lineage. Likewise, people complaining about the lineage are also complaining about an individual member of that lineage. These views of lineages are important, since they might influence how potential in-laws interact. The coming together of patrilineages is cemented across marriage rituals.

Wedding rituals are sites of reciprocal exchanges. The groom's and bride's kin networks exchange visits and gifts across three consecutive days of rituals. Throughout these events, people participate in ritualized drunkenness that marks some participants as distributors and other participants as recipients. During these events, the distributors and recipients become momentarily bound to a reciprocal exchange such that both parties must drink liquor. These occasions of ritual drunkenness occur at the behest of a high-status couple, the *compadres*. The male *compadre* allocates bottles to the distributors.

Along the same lines, *compadres* draw from certain kin network members for *wexantani* (ritualized labor). The laborers in *wexantani* are responsible for preparing foodstuffs that they will distribute to the high-status couple's guests. People openly state they feel compelled to engage in *wexantani* because it is reciprocal, meaning that they will be able to draw on others if they need labor for

their ritual events. Without reciprocal labor, people would have to pay for services, which for most families would be economically unfeasible. The other option, to forego marriage altogether, would be unrealistic.

Reciprocal exchanges, even at a micro-level of two people, are more than dyadic contracts. An observer unfamiliar with the distinction between twitches and winks might see two parties involved in sharing a drink, an action of little or no overall importance. However, even the micro-exchange is linked to many more reciprocal exchanges that serve an overall purpose. For example, the person redistributing bottles of liquor is incorporating attendees into reciprocal exchanges through ritual drunkenness.

An invitee redistributes liquor at the behest of the godfather, either the bride's or the groom's. If at the behest of the groom's godfather, this individual is linked to the tempuchakwa side of the marriage—men incorporating women into their homes. The groom's father is responsible for paying for the reception. If at the behest of the bride's godfather, the individual distributing liquor and receiving liquor is linked to the wampuchakwa, which would formally mean appropriating a male, but in reality is a loss. The female's house has one less working hand. The bride will fall under the dominion of the groom's mother and others in his paternal lines.

In most cases, the average inhabitant of Cheran has no choice but to engage in reciprocal exchanges. People call on members of their kin networks, and in turn get called on by them. If someone were to fail to engage in the reciprocal process

that person would no longer be able to count on the help of others. They would have to pay people to help, which is financially unrealistic. They will also be reprimanded, if not ostracized. Such a failure is categorized as a lack of *kaxumpikwa* and can lead to various forms of negative responses, ranging from anger to witchcraft.

Similarly, families engage in reciprocal exchanges in the wedding simulacrum referred to as *tumpi jueces*. The *tumpi* and *yuritskiri* exchange food and drinks; they exchange fruit on a phallic symbol (the log) and clothes on a vaginal symbol (the V-shaped structure); they momentarily merge as if they were bringing together two patrilineal surnames. The event occurs in the town plaza, ensuring that all witness this momentary union. The reciprocal exchanges, merging, and processions mirror the wedding rituals.

The sum total of a lifetime of kin relations is exemplified by burial practices. Even in death, a female is buried with her husband's paternal surname kin. Nevertheless, females retain their surname (paternal and maternal) after marriage). The female retains membership in her kin group but is now at the behest of her husband's kin groups.

Females circulate, and males do not (except in extremely rare cases). The *casero* 'father of the groom', pays a lot of money and calls upon kin, and is obliged to reciprocate when called upon. This might help explain why returning a wife is such a troublesome procedure. It means more financial strife for the ex-husband's

household, while for the ex-wife's family it can render them labeled as unfit for marriage. The stigma is huge, and people fear being labeled as such.

Cheran's sociocentrism finds parallels in cultural practices that are similar to part-to-whole. Ritualized exchanges are not simply a dyadic interaction. They involve sociocentric individuals, which means an individual who is inextricably connected to extensive kinship-based networks which comprise close kin (consanguine, affine and fictive) and friends. However, these reciprocal exchanges are not strict social "rules." Thus it is not certain that if an individual does something for another, this act will be reciprocated in the future. As such there is always a degree of uncertainty and tension on both sides.

4.5. Conclusion

I return to the opening vignette in which Don Chatarra spreads rumors about another elderly male. Had this act been an isolated incident it wouldn't merit much analytic attention; however, further research revealed that it was pattern of behavior. Don Chatarra portrayed many other individuals, not just Campeon, in a negative light. He expressed disdain for that negative behavior while presenting himself as the exact opposite. Even so, when encountering that person he would greet him and smile. I came to realize that things are not what they seem. Others verified that Don Chatarra had put words into the mouth of the other elderly male. He ascribed to him exactly the behavior that most other people ascribed to Don Chatarra. They said that he presented himself in a false light and vilified others to make himself look good. This was even confirmed by third parties who are related

to Don Chatarra. People consider him to be a gossipmonger, a troublemaker who then enrolls his spouse and daughters to help him fight his battles. Furthermore, it doesn't end with him. People ascribe Don Chatarra's behavior to the surname members of his household and ascribe generalizations about the surname patrilineage to individual members.

There are reemerging patterns in Cheran. People attribute individual behaviors to their familial origin and project generalizations about families onto individuals. While some may say this occurs everywhere, one would need to look at the overall cultural patterns within a particular society to understand what they do and what they mean. For the P'urhépecha in Cheran, these acts run parallel to part-whole and sociocentrism. Along the same lines, people reproduce sets of coerced behaviors involving ritualized drinking and reciprocal labor. People are bonded because they form a part of a greater union. People reproduce these patterns in simulacra of unions between young adolescent males and females. The sum of these patterns has implications that endure during the life and after the death of an individual.

Chapter 5 Cyclical Activities

Above *Ciudad Perdida*, grey clouds gathered until they masked the sky. Every so often, they awed and frightened folks with thunder and lightning. Everyone seemed to be enjoying the wedding festivities. Older men stood talking while their families sat eating mole, tortillas, and tamales. A few large speakers blasted the Mexican versions of a genre of South American dance music called *cumbia*, so people were forced to shout into each other's ears. "San Anselmo (Saint Anselm) is a god, a rain god," yelled Neza, the twenty-year-old mason with a penchant for nightlife. Two guys stumbled into us with a bottle of tequila, interrupting our chat. They first turned to Neza, who slammed a half-empty bottle of beer on the table, then to me. We gulped down the shots of liquor, frowned, then wiped our mouths in unison. I felt tiny drops of rain that stung like pinpricks on my arms. Neza tilted his head up, smiled, then rested his gaze on the road behind me.

I turned to watch three brothers dancing to the rhythm of a special type of music played in the *Kw'anikukwa* ritual. The band members played the same tune again and again at the request of the brothers. They took three steps forward, three steps back, twirled, and howled at the sky. Men smiled, women laughed, and children giggled. By now I had the feeling of hundreds of cold nails hitting my body.

I was getting wet. The rain caused people to scatter in different directions. Some crammed themselves together under a tarp and others under trees. The brothers continued dancing. A drunk man with a sombrero shoved a bottle of tequila in front of us. He carried soda in his *sutupu* ‘handwoven palm bag.’ “Tell me when,” said the man. “Serve yourself too,” I replied. Others nearby held their plastic cups tight, claiming they were still full of liquor. They lied to stay as sober as possible for as long as possible. An effort that was impossible. Before moonrise, everyone would have drunk until they too were dancing in the rain.

As I recounted the night’s events, Tata Pe listened, smiled, and nodded. As a young man in the late 1950’s, he was a *carguero* ‘cargo-holder’ for the town’s *fiesta* ‘quasi-spiritual festival’⁸. “The old men used to pour liquor over the heads of the people. They would say, ‘What do you come for, if not to drink?’ That *Kw’anikukwa* is a good fiesta,” said Tata Pe. He spoke fondly of the *panaleros* ‘hive experts’⁹ since they worked in the mountains as he had done most of his life. “When the *Kw’anikukwa* returns, the *panaleros* will dance as they carry those *katarhakwas* ‘ritual wooden structures.’ Drinking, dancing, and more drinking. Everyone will watch them!” said Tata Pe. I thought to myself before asking him, “Why?” “It is *Corpus*¹⁰,” he replied. “But what does it all mean?” I asked. He laughed then said,

⁸ In Mesoamerican ethnography, the term *fiesta* refers to the quasi-ritual celebrations held on a cyclical basis in honor of Catholic saints. The Spanish introduced Catholicism into Michoacan, Mexico in the early years of the 16th century.

⁹ In Cheran, people refer to specialists who locate and collect wasp hives as *panaleros*, since the Spanish term for hive is *panal*. The P’urhépecha term for hive is *kwipu*. Hive honey is a regional delicacy.

¹⁰ *Corpus* refers to the Catholic fiesta of Corpus Christi. The P’urhépecha name for the fiesta does not translate into *Corpus*, rather, it points to an action; mainly, throwing, since across P’urhépecha towns, participants in *corpus* throw their goods into crowds of onlookers.

“The rain feeds the crops. *Yapuru ísi* ‘everywhere.’ It feeds the trees, mushrooms, and greens. We need it.” I knew the region suffered from water shortages; I just failed to realize that Tata Pe had answered both my questions.

Building on the “Why” question I posed to Tata Pe, this chapter further develops his answers by examining anxieties, social order, and ritual. I will display how the kw’anikukwa serves a life-sustaining and regenerating function. I argue that, as petitioners seek to manipulate agents for desired outcomes, whether good behavior, good rainfall, or good crops, they reproduce the part-whole pattern up to a community level. The first section discusses three key sites of anxiety-provoking uncertainties: behavior, season, and agriculture. The second section describes the kw’anikukwa ritual from two vantage points: as a participant with the cargo-holders of the katarhakwas and as a bystander on the street viewing processions. The third section highlights the disorderly order of kw’anikukwa as a means of addressing uncertainties and alleviating anxieties.

5.1 Uncertainties and Anxieties: Behavioral, Seasonal, Agricultural

In the following section, I discuss the three main uncertainties that cause anxieties for the Cheran P’urhépecha. Behavioral uncertainties evoke skepticism, if not downright cynicism, in people. While the elderly P’urhépecha-speaking population boasts the merits of *kaxumpikwa* ‘respect’ and draws from these shared ideas to regiment others, some people intentionally or inadvertently flout these social conventions. Some of the people’s concerns about behavior lie in the problems inherent in distinguishing between advertent and inadvertent social behaviors. At

best people are only able to guess at one another's intentions. There lies the rub: the Cheran P'urhépecha tend to read other people's actions negatively. Hence the uncertainties and anxieties that arise when interacting with people and reflecting on these interactions.

Uncertainty and anxieties about the seasons are inextricably tied to those related to agricultural activities. Everyone is subject to the vagaries of the weather. They collectively depend on the rain to water the crops. Without sufficient water, not enough corn will be produced. Along the same lines, if it rains too much, flooding will ensue. If it gets too cold then the rain will become hail, which could damage crops irreparably. People of all age groups, farmers and non-farmers alike, depend on good weather and the resultant good harvests for corn-related foodstuffs that they will use both for daily consumption and also to feed themselves and their guests during ritual events. Ideally, people prefer recurring optimal conditions in human behavior, the seasonal weather, and agriculture since these all affect everyday social life in important ways.

5.1.1 Behavioral Kaxumpikwa-no kaxumpikwa

During my initial sojourn in Cheran, my household resided with Nana G. Every night she would shell corn. The next morning, after awakening in the cold, dark hours before sunrise, she would bathe, dress herself, then carry a small bucket of corn kernels to the nearby mill and return with the same bucket now filled with corn dough. By early sunrise she would be wearing an apron over her clothing, and a red bandana held her hair back. She would kneel on a reed mat in front of the

hearth in the kitchen where she used a stone tool to further grind the dough over the flat surface of the *metate* ‘grinding stone’, then gather palm-sized clumps that she slapped with both hands into flat circles. She cooked these flattened circles of corn dough on the *comal* ‘cooking plate’ heated by the flames emanating from the hearth. When done, she placed each steaming pile of tortillas into separate cloths. At these moments, while her spouse was working in the distant mountains, we would engage in long conversations. She was a lively, engaged interlocutor: ready to listen and eager to share her insights about some matters that she took seriously, and others that she felt were simply unworthy of my attention.

On one of these cold mornings as the sun began to slowly rise, I noticed that Nana G seemed a bit perturbed. My wife noticed too. She asked her, “What’s wrong?” Nana G responded, “You never know what others will do. Don’t go trusting others!” Before discussing the incident that had just occurred, she related the history of her experiences with her neighbor as a lesson for us. Decades prior, she had had a warm relationship with this person. They were mutually respectful. But when their husbands had had a falling out over a property, things changed quickly. The neighbor had found, or even made up, reasons to lash out at Nana G. So, they, too, had had a falling out. As Nana G warned us about her, she made it clear that we were to keep these insights in mind as we traveled around Cheran and spoke to people. One of the things she drilled into us was to eschew speaking about anything important on the street. She was adamant about that. After warning us, she returned to the incident that took place that earlier that morning.

“Do not trust others. There are many *chismosos* ‘*gossipers*.’ Even if you run into your own kin, do not tell her too much. There are far too many *chismosos* around here. So many *chismosos*. People like to talk. It is better to keep it all a secret,” said Nana G. She paused, then requested that we withhold any knowledge about her health, regardless of the inquirer. She said a friend, blood relative or acquaintance was just as likely to do no good with that information. She also made us promise that we wouldn’t even share our own health status with anyone on the street. My wife Xara and I obliged. However, I was privately slightly amused by this, since I wondered what was the worst that could happen by telling somebody I had a cold. It appeared that Nana G was overly concerned about something that seemed trivial to me. However, as I came to learn through experience, few matters are trivial in the eyes of the people of Cheran.

Some years later, in 2015, Tata Pe and Nana Le would echo Nana G’s words when they emphasized that my spouse and I should take great precautions when speaking to people. It was another instance of the almost cynical approach people had to interactions with others. We visited the pair nearly every day; they happily received us. The elderly couple was seated in their small kitchen, next to a pile of pine firewood neatly stacked against the wooden wall. They beckoned us inside to drink *nurhite*, a tea made from a thin, small leaf from a type of tree that grows in the higher mountain ranges of Michoacan. We sat on small wooden stools in the kitchen, which was dimly illuminated by the embers that glowed in the hearth near the middle of the room. That’s when Nana C entered the compound.

Nana C is Nana Le's niece, a daughter of one of her sisters. She lived a short distance away on a nearby mountainside and usually stopped by on her way to or from her daily chores some distance away in the town's plaza. On this day she was seeking counsel from the elderly couple. She began recounting how a woman in her kin network behaved in a way that made her uneasy about their relationship. Upon hearing the brief update, Nana Le responded, "Oh, different!" Nana C said, "I had seen her at the latest *wexantani* 'reciprocal ritual labor'¹¹ where we were making tamales. She began speaking out loud, uncharacteristically loud, even for her." Nana Le interjected, "She is quite the loudmouth, but this was a performance. It was deliberate! She was trying to sow discord by speaking so everyone could hear." Nana Le advised Nana C about her next steps before turning the conversation to us.

Nana Le reminded us of a recent set of events that were similar to those narrated by Nana C. We had sat through Nana C's recounting of her own troubles with a heightened sense of concern for that very reason, I would come to find out later. Nana Le said, "Do you two recall the time both of you were mentioned at a *wexantani*?" "Yes," we responded. She then voiced the words uttered by a sister of one of our relative's wives: "Oh they are a lovely pair, look at them here with us. They were not supposed to be here, it was not required of them, but here they are. They are such a lovely couple. That they are here says so much about them as

¹¹ The *Wexantani* has no true translation in English. The word is comprised of the root *we-* meaning to arise out of some area, the locative suffix *-xa-* which can refer to a body part, either a knee or braid of hair, or a location such as a flat area such as a horizon from afar, the repeated action suffix, *-nta-* and the infinitive suffix *-ni*. *Wexantani*, thus can refer to labor (a tacit action given the word's use in context) from the knees since women who grind corn, heat tortillas, or make tamales do so seated in such manner. Women engaging in reciprocal labor repeatedly exchange food-related labor.

people.” The woman who said this did so, as far as I could discern, with sincerity. It appeared to be a friendly gesture. However, Nana Le was drawing our attention to something more, which I certainly failed to detect in that seemingly positive evaluation of our presence at the wexantani. Nana Le explained that by bringing all that attention to us, the woman was making us a target for others. Other envious people who were mired in soured marriages or detested providing reciprocal labor at such an early hour, could hold this against us. In other words, I had taken this incident at face value without understanding its true implications for lifelong members of the community.

The elderly couple continued explaining these events to me so that I could better prepare myself to avoid conflict in the future. I engaged in reciprocal labor that was neither required nor expected of me for the purposes of my research. I had to engage in the necessary ethnographic participant-observations to gather insights into daily life. Furthermore, because I am a married man, I had to have my wife accompany me, otherwise people would have ostracized me for excluding her from participation in these kinship activities. This led in turn to feelings of guilt on my part because of the undue burden my anthropological research was bringing to my own household. Nana Le explained that some people would resent us for doing a little more than required, since it meant that others could use our example to get a little more out of them than is usually the case. So, it turned out that the person I thought was simply being courteous had actually behaved in a way that was not in our best interests. The elderly pair nodded. They were clearly concerned. Tata Pe

said, “If anyone finds or even makes up a reason, they will use it to do you harm. We should display *kaxumpikwa*, and we do.” Nana Le added, “But others might not. They might succumb to envy or rage. They might listen to rumors then attack you. You don’t know what they are thinking, what they will do next. You don’t know how they will think and react.” “If they believe the worst, you will begin to see them act differently,” said Tata Pedro.

As more time passed, I began contemplating the reasons that people avoided divulging their own secrets. It seems consonant with what these elders said to posit that people fear repercussions¹². If you have already provoked envy or rancor, then someone could use this information against you. If someone becomes disgruntled as a result, that person could also use any information about you to inflict further harm on you. There were family and friends you could trust and others you could not. Even among those you could trust, you had to remain vigilant, display proper etiquette, and notice who was not reciprocating. The couple’s words rang true, echoing our aunt’s, as events unfolded before us.

Rumors carry double potential for harm. The rumor can cause strife as some people will alienate the gossiper. These will more often be folks who do not require the reciprocal services of that individual. Those who do require services will maintain ties, but actively monitor that individual’s activities. Another

¹² Most people fear reprisals via witchcraft. Some people are scared to the extent that they avoid discussing the topic as much as possible. It is through protracted everyday life that one becomes exposed to such fears over behavior. If someone interacted with P’urhépecha, even across years, without really engaging with daily life over an extended period of time, they would be none the wiser for the near lack of discourse about the subject. The topic of witchcraft merits its own consideration, worthy of a few monologues. By briefly mentioning it here, I have exhausted its relevance to the dissertation’s purpose.

consequence of rumors arises as people use them to justify their animosity toward others. Because one person can always claim that another person is a gossip, the accused can retaliate with rumors, physical violence, or witchcraft. People exist in a state of perpetual uncertainty over what others might do, and because of those uncertainties they are filled with anxieties over their own and others' actions. These behavioral uncertainties constitute the first source of anxieties.

5.1.2 Seasonal: *Ementa-K'arhinta*

The next source of anxiety is the seasonal cycle: *ementa* 'wet season' and *k'arhinta* 'dry season'. The term *ementa* is comprised of the root *e-* denoting see, *-me-* denoting water, and *-nta-* denoting a repeated action. Likewise, *k'arhinta* is comprised of the morpheme *k'arhi-* denoting dry and *-nta-* denoting a repeated action. The terms, despite describing opposing seasons, possess similar grammatical patterns. While a semantic analysis of these two terms reveals an understanding of these actions as cyclical, a social analysis reveals that people consider these two seasons as potential events whose occurrence or lack thereof is a point of concern.

Indeed, the P'urhépecha also regard these two seasons differently. They display much more concern and intrigue about the wet season than they do about the dry season. They hold the rain in high regard, but fear its presence outside of its cycle, or fear its force if it becomes torrential. In contrast, people do not admire the dry season. It is, nonetheless, a source of fear. There are important cultural reasons that explain the central place of the rainy season among the P'urhépecha.

First, P'urhépecha speakers consider the rain an agent. It is quite common to hear people say *janikwekani* or *janinchani*. The root *jani-* denotes rain, whereas the morphemes *-kweka-* and *-ncha-* denote a desired action. Hence, when someone says, “*Janikwekaxati*,” the individual is saying that the rain itself wants to fall, given the aspectual morpheme *-xa-* and the third person mode *-ti*. Rather than explaining away these patterns as restricted to grammatical properties, an analyst is best served understanding speech in context as it relates to general cultural patterns among individuals in the area. When people say the rain itself wants to fall, it is not that the grammar is simply forcing them to say it this way, rather they sincerely believe it is literally true. This is reflected in discussions, comments, songs, and native exegesis about signs.

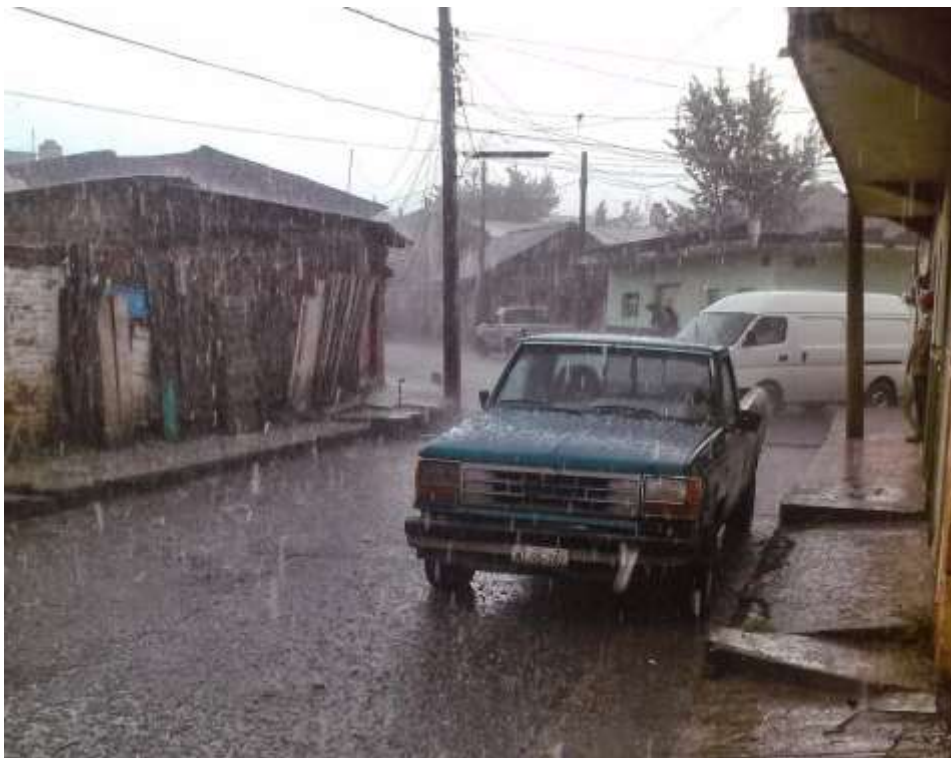


Figure 10 A typical day in the rainy season "Ementa"

Because the P'urhépecha grammatically and socially impute agency to the rain, they have also granted it a special place across cultural manifestations. In P'urhépecha music, referred to as *Pirekwa*, many songs make mention of the rainy season. More often than not, the rain is associated with a pleasant or positive setting or set of events. The ideal state of affairs is one in which people enjoy rainfall. People will consider oddly timed rain as a sign of some negative set of events. Likewise, if people are awaiting rain and are hoping for a certain amount of rainfall then they will view its appearance as a good sign. There is another good reason that rain has a special significance for Cheran's inhabitants—much like other communities in the Juatarhu region, Cheran experiences habitual water scarcity. Even with the advent of plumbing, people often suffer from water shortages. The primary source of water—whether for drinking, cooking, bathing, or cleaning—remains rain. People use buckets and other receptacles to gather rainwater and store it for use. When the rain behaves oddly, people begin to worry about what lies ahead. The following ethnographic example will serve to demonstrate the aforementioned points.

It was a cold night in the middle of August. I had finished supper with Don Chatarra's household, and we remained in the kitchen warming ourselves around the hearth¹³. Don Chatarra sat idly on his small, wooden stool staring out the kitchen door into the darkness of his courtyard. He had requested that the lights be

¹³ The people of Cheran typically share meals and conversation around the parankwa 'cooking hearth.' In most houses with a traditional design, the kitchen is its own wooden building. In the center of that small, wooden building is usually the parankwa. To share meals and talk around the parankwa is standard custom across P'urhépecha communities.

switched off because he felt only a fool would walk through that much rain. The sound of rain reverberating off the roof's metal sheets and the ground outside was deafening, so that the only way to converse was by yelling directly into someone's ear. He looked like a defeated man—long in the face, head burrowed deep into his chest, and his eyes a bit more glossy than usual. It was the look of a man who was battling to hold back his tears until they filled his eyes and made them red. I asked, "Is everything ok?" Don Chatarra replied, "What do you mean, 'Is everything ok?' Are you blind, man? Are you deaf? Look out there. It really wants to rain. The rain really wants to let us have it." I said, "But the rain is good, right? It won't rain until it floods." Don Chatarra took a deep breath, then said, "It is cold. That rain will turn to hail. As hard as it's raining, the hail will fall twice as hard into the corn fields. They will get beaten down." I saw he was in no mood to continue talking, so I sat there with him in silence. Shortly afterwards, the rain turned to hail and fell very hard.

Don Chatarra's lament over the rain is a microcosm of the attitude of Cheran's P'urhépecha. For the Cheran P'urhépecha the rain is something that is largely uncertain because it can do as it pleases. It is similar to other entities like humans in that both can do as they please, within certain constraints, but they can also be manipulated to behave in certain ways. This is something I will touch upon further along in the chapter. The rain also factors into how people discuss the dry season.

The rain-related uncertainties concerning the dry season also provoke anxieties. For instance, the yóntki anapwecha, especially those who proudly identify as working in the mountains “*los del cerro*”, explain excessive sun-produced heat and dryness as resulting from the greed-driven unrestrained logging that left huge areas of the mountain range on the verge of ecological collapse¹⁴. These old-time loggers claim that the loss of so many trees dissuade the clouds from producing rain. This is an example of one of the ways humans can mediate the seasonal cycle, in this case in a negative way. Further on in the dissertation I will elaborate on a positive form of human intervention in the rain. Similarly, people also fret over the duration of the dry season. They hope it will not last too long since this would postpone the rain, which would in turn delay the start of the agricultural cycle.

The difference in attitudes toward the dry season and the wet season here becomes apparent. People actively worry about the rain while also holding it in high regard, whereas while they also worry about the dry season, they don't pay it much attention. When people consider the dry season, they are really still focused on what the rain might or might not do, or what people might or might not do to affect the cycle. In other words, the rain is the agent that is responsible for prolonging or shortening the dry season.

¹⁴ Deforestation is a problem that has plagued Michoacan state, Mexico. The communities comprising P'urhépecha territory have experienced hardship because of this ecological disaster. Even those individuals who have participated in deforestation have not truly profited from it and suffer its negative consequences. On the other hand, the groups gaining lucrative earnings from deforestation—who shall remain unnamed for fear of retaliation—have tried to use the land for meth labs and avocado fields—both of which are transnational revenue generating enterprises.

The environmental cycle is thus not completely fixed but can be manipulated. It is through these environmental seasons (before, during, and after) that the P'urhépecha live and die, experience joy and suffering. They experience uncertainties about rainfall and excessive heat. These anxieties are exacerbated by the water shortages across the Juatarhu region of P'urhépecha territory. Most communities find themselves enduring droughts every so often. People have traditionally used any and all hollow receptacles—plates, bowls, buckets—to store rainwater, which is used for any and all purposes. However, the rain is never certain. People fear that it might not rain; yet they hope it does. Uncertainty about the seasonal cycle carries implications for Cheran's inhabitants.

5.1.3 Agricultural

The final source of anxiety is the agricultural cycle. The agricultural cycle is comprised of two primary activities: *tsiri jatsini* 'planting corn' and *p'ikuntani* 'harvest.' To know the agricultural cycle is to understand the inextricable relationship between these two activities. Planting begins at the very end of the dry season and harvesting occurs at the very end of the wet season. While in between these two activities people undertake many other agricultural tasks—such as cutting weeds or removing green corn for consumption or sale—the main focal points of the cycle are planting and harvesting.

Agricultural activities occur in a space referred to as the *milpa* 'corn field'. Most milpas are in the farming areas in Cheran's territory—mountains, the outskirts of towns or other sparsely populated areas. Some people plant in their

backyards or a lot that they have not used to build a house. While I experienced home property planting and saw countless crops in backyards, I will focus on crops grown in the milpa proper, since this is the most important domain of agricultural labor and food production. I begin by describing the tsiri jatsini from the first-person perspective of ethnographic observation.

When discussing the planting season, a single grain comes to mind: tsiri, most commonly known in English as corn. The P'urhépecha diet is first and foremost corn-based. P'urhépecha *kamata* 'corn gruel', more popularly referred to in Mexico as atole, is made from ground corn kernels and water or milk. A common P'urhépecha meal, *atapakwa*, is similar to corn gruel but made with chili sauce and meat, cheese, or squash. People eat countless corn tortillas with every meal. They also eat many different types of tamales. Corn is the staple grain of Cheran, used for both daily and ritual meals. Without corn, the average P'urhépecha's diet would be severely impacted.

The agricultural cycle is performed with a general sense of when things should be done as opposed to following a precise schedule. The elders, and others in the know, say that the best time to plant is during the full moon. The lunar cycle is generally viewed as having a powerful influence on the growth of living organisms. For instance, a person born when the moon is full is said to develop into a healthy, strong individual. Likewise, when people plant corn on full moons, these corn crops produce abundant yields. People plant corn around March. They harvest corn around November, December and January. In between planting and harvesting,

they remove weeds and then return to pick green corn around August. Most of the harvest cycle corresponds to the production of corn-based foodstuffs.

Indeed, the consumption of corn-based foodstuffs closely follows the agricultural cycle. Green corn is highly prized because its soft, tender grains can be used for producing various seasonal dishes. People enjoy making *kamata putsiti* ‘corn gruel made from anis herb and soft corn grains’ using the *tiriapu* ‘green cob’. The preferred way of preparing the *tiriapu* is to boil them. As the weeks pass and the kernels on the cobs become a bit harder, people roast them or place them in the embers of a fire. When the kernels are very hard, people make *uchepu* ‘a type of lumpy tamale made with cinnamon’ and *pinole* ‘roasted ground corn’. Some people purchase corn from others who dedicate themselves exclusively to planting and harvesting. This dynamic produces a division of labor and market.

The folks working in the agricultural sector can be divided into two classes. On the one hand, there are the landowners who plant and harvest crops on their own land. Most people obtain land by inheriting it. They can then use this land to generate some income that helps them purchase more land. Often, people sell their inherited land to pay off debts. People also buy land or acquire it through barter. For instance, old Don Chatarra had a considerable area of land that technically was not his. He explained the arrangement to me. Given that Don Chatarra had worked many years as a field laborer in the U.S., and on his return to Mexico received remittances from some of his offspring abroad, he had accumulated some savings, and had a slightly elevated social status compared to those with less

income. Someone tied to a member of his kin network, but not directly linked to Don Chatarra, found himself in financial straits. He had just married a son, and then found himself in need of funds to pay off some doctor's bills. He therefore asked Don Chatarra for a loan. It was not much, but nevertheless Don Chatarra insisted that the money be repaid. Unfortunately, the man's troubles did not end there. He found himself unable to pay back Don Chatarra immediately and offered him his inheritance (a large piece of land) that he could use until he paid back the debt in full. Don Chatarra told me that over a decade and a half had passed and the man still hadn't paid off the debt; hence, Don Chatarra used the land to plant and harvest.

The second class of agricultural laborers are the *peones* 'peons'. Some folks offer their labor as peons. They will work someone's land in exchange for money. Sometimes the peon will earn money and a few sacks of cobs. Most people with significantly large patches of land use tractors to till the sunbaked soil and plant. This makes for a quicker planting routine, but the planter accrues the costs of the tractor and its fuel. I will share my experience planting on a relative's land. It describes the older way of manual planting, since the owner of the plot opted to plant this way. It is much cheaper than paying someone to use a tractor, but also much more labor intensive.

The mornings were cold. A stiff cold that stings your face and hands. The rising sun helped until it became overbearing as well. There was an exodus of men

from their homes out into the mountains. They were decked out with sweaters, beanies, or sombreros, some of which they might remove within a few hours.

A few minutes past 10 a.m., I was working on transcription alongside my assistant when I heard knocking at the door. It was a sharp, repetitive sound, about four consecutive taps. After a pause, four more. It was loud enough that you could hear it from a few houses down. As is typical in this part of the world, the visitor was using a coin or similar hard object to knock on the door.

I walked over to open it and saw R.T.F, R for short. R is a trained engineer with an M.A., and he teaches at the local Indigenous university (*Universidad Intercultural Indígena de Michoacán*) over in a nearby Juatarhu town, Pichataro.

He greeted me with the words, “Nephew, how has your morning been? *Chambeando?* ‘working?’ R invited me to plant. He was aware of my research and was enthusiastic about helping to introduce me to elders for the purpose of my research, and more importantly, for gathering recordings that the community could use in the future to help people learn to speak our ancestral tongue. He was actively learning to speak the language too. Whenever he had a chance, he exchanged greetings with me in P’urhépecha. The agricultural cycle is of utmost important to people and the invitation guaranteed another view of it along with a few sacks’ worth of corn cobs once the cycle ended. We agreed to meet again the next day. He would pick me up, so that we could travel over to the patch of land on his father’s property that we would use for planting.

The next morning, I was awakened before dawn by the sounds of a rooster crowing and a cell phone alarm. I readied myself then drank a small cup of nurhite tea before heading out to the street. I stood in front of the house so that R wouldn't have to knock on the door and awaken my children. A few moments later R arrived in a small, rusty old blue pickup truck. I hopped inside, and we drove over to the so-called lost city section of Cheran that borders an area on the outskirts of town known as *Cruzirhu* 'place of the cross'—this general area is on a road that heads towards the eastern mountain ranges.

It was still dark. According to R it was better this way. We could exert ourselves planting corn before sunrise. Once the sun rose, not only would it unleash its force on our bodies, but it would also harden the ground. The night's dew would make the ground a bit softer initially. So, he said. In fact, it was as hard as concrete. R said that once the sun was close to the zenith, we would call it a day. It was a perfect plan for two city slickers who spent far more time in libraries than in milpas. And since it was R's plot, he could call the shots as to how long we worked and how many *zurcos* 'corn rows' we planted. We would then be freed of our agricultural duties and continue working elsewhere.

Most land-owning *campesinos* 'farmers' in Cheran will pay someone to use a tractor to till the dirt. Then they will pay him again to use his gasoline-guzzling machine to plant seeds in the dirt. We planted with hand tools. A shovel and a hoe. The method was clever: you place the tool in the ground, lever the dirt forward, place the seed in the resulting hole, move the tool back, lift it out and then scrape

soil into a mound over the top. R opted to plant by hand because it saved money. He was less concerned about saving time. He only needed enough corn for his own family and their ritual events, so he was perfectly happy doing it manually. He considered the labor a form of early morning exercise that provided him with a chance to look out into the nearby mountain ranges on his paternal land.



Figure 11 R planting corn on his paternal land

R instructed me on how to do it all. How to place the corn grain in the proper position. The part of the seed that was connected to the cob must face the sky. Let the seed remain in the dirt as if standing. That helps the seedling sprout with full vigor and makes for a stronger plant. A good, sturdy stalk to bear high quality corn cobs. If the seed is sown incorrectly, it makes it harder to sprout and results in a

poor plant. The stalk will be weak, susceptible to ailments or bending, and produce smaller cobs with smaller grains. A good quality stalk that bears good cobs is the result of proper positioning. We continued in this way until he decided we should end the day's planting so we could continue with our other daily labors and chores. We repeated the daily cycle over the course of a few weeks. Such is the way that people plant corn by hand.

Once the months have passed, people get ready to participate in the *p'ikuntani* 'harvest'. The *p'ikuntani* takes place during the months of October, November, and December. The verbal theme *p'iku-* denotes picking, the morpheme *-nta-*, to repeat an action, and of course the infinitive *-ni-*. Grammatically, the word denotes the repeated action of picking, while leaving unstated what is being picked. However, people only ever use the term to describe the corn harvest. The social use of language constrains the domain of the term to the staple crop.

The owner of a plot has two main options when planning a *p'ikuntani*: 1) call upon members of his kin network to help harvest (something that will count as reciprocal labor), or 2) acquire the services of peons for hire. Based on my ethnographic experiences, I have found that some people use a mixture of these two, especially if their social networks cannot support the labor required for a full harvest. Others draw exclusively from hired peons. The reasons for these distinctions, outside of the reason already provided, seem to be just a matter of personal preference. From the point of acquiring help, the stage is set for the actual *p'ikuntani*, which is a social event on a corn field that is usually completed over the

course of a day. Below, I share my experience harvesting crops with Don Chatarra's group of kin network members and peons.



Figure 12 The Elderly couple walking over to p'ikuntani 'harvest' their crop.

On the day of p'ikuntani, the property “owner” Don Chatarra and his workers met early in the morning at his home, then traveled to the corn field. In the field, we walked through the milpa, using machetes or sickles to remove corn from the stalk, then to cut the stalk at its base. We gathered the cobs in *xundes* ‘straw baskets’ or sacks. The harvesters using baskets carried them on their backs, adding corn cobs until they were filled, which made them heavy. At that point, they placed the basket on the ground. Harvesters using sacks employed another strategy. They filled their sacks—already spread out across the milpa— with corn cobs (still in their husks). Once a section of the milpa had been picked, Don Chatarra's adult grandchildren drove a truck into the area. The truck entered in reverse from the

far end of the field. The plan was that the men closest to the truck would carry the sacks, which were wider than a man's body and heavier too, over to the truck. We would drop the sacks, and baskets, in front of the truck bed. Once there, two more men would hoist the sacks into the truck and stack them. Men began grabbing the sacks nearest them. However, the ground was uneven, and the truck could not reverse all the way to the place where we had collected all the corn. So, men began staggering with their enormous loads the length of a city block towards the truck. The strain on my arms was excruciating. One of Don Chatarra's adult grandchildren tried to carry a sack but could only make it a few steps. The men sweated. We would pause for a while after carrying the sacks to the truck, gasping for air, then go back for more.



Figure 13 Don Chatarra's kinfolk harvesting his corn field

As the men worked in the milpa, Don Chatarra's female kin worked in the homestead. My wife filled me in on the details of their activities, which my co-harvesters confirmed. The women prepared the harvest meal that would feed their kinfolk and the peons—the latter came alone without their wives. Female labor starts several days, sometimes a week, before the p'ikuntani. They must remove the corn grain from the cobs; at this point in the year both the grain and the cob are rock hard. Then they must "*pelar nixtamal*" which is the process by which they render corn digestible by boiling it with lime and ash before rinsing it with water—a process that removes the outer skin of the grain. These grains will then be taken to the *molino* 'mill' (usually the day before or the same day, early in the morning) so that the grain is ground into dough. The women will turn the dough into tamales and tortillas, which are as necessary for P'urhépecha meals as bread or potatoes for Americans, or rice for other cultures.

When the women arrived a few hours past noon, they brought with them huge clay pots for the harvest meal. Don Chatarra's wife along with other females (e.g., his daughters and the spouses of his close kin involved in p'ikuntani) prepared the traditional ritual meal: *churipu* 'a red chilli-based beef and cabbage stew' and *kurunta* 'a small roundish tamale wrapped in a green corn leaf'. The women served the harvesting group, who ate in the milpa. On other ritual occasions it is the men who take plates of food to guests. However, the harvest reverses those roles. This could be because of the type of labor involved, which is so deeply connected to providing the most important source of food: corn.

The tsiri jatsini and p'ikuntani together provide the staple food supply for an entire year. The milpa is the site of the cycle. This cycle provides households with food and income. From the milpa, people get corn or other foodstuffs such as beans and squash (and delicacies such as corn fungus and squash flowers). The corn stalk is also regarded as a sweet treat. The corn leaves are used for the special tamal, *korunta*. The corn tassels are used in various foods. Leftover corn stalks are gathered, ground up and fed to animals such as pigs or cows. Not a single part of the plant is wasted. While the tsiri jatsini starts the agricultural cycle, the p'ikuntani ends it.

5.2 A Kw'inchikwa / Fiesta: The Kw'anikukwa / Corpus

The agricultural cycle is intimately connected to the ritual cycle—the famed Mesoamerican *fiestas*. While most of Cheran's monolingual Spanish speakers (the exception being some of the middle-aged inhabitants) refer to fiestas, or cyclical rituals, exclusively by the Spanish-language names of the Catholic saints who have become associated with them, the elders use both Spanish and P'urhépecha names interchangeably. However, all people still use the term kw'inchikwa to refer to fiestas in general. The term kw'inchikwa carries with it a spatialized meaning. The root, *kw'í-* refers to sleep. The suffix, *-nchi-* is a spatial suffix. It denotes hanging from above. For example, *tirianchini* would be a swing: the ropes of the swing are tied to a tree branch high above the person on the swing. It also refers to a vertical axis. The suffix *-kwa* converts a stem into a noun. So, the term kw'inchikwa literally means “sleeping above”. Some P'urhépecha hold that the term

originally referred to ancient, precolonial, ritual behavior that produced an altered state of consciousness (possibly induced by the ingestion of mushrooms) during which a person exits the body into a realm suspended above, and from which they must return, in a sort of ritualized out-of-body experience. Afterwards, to help the consciousness return to the body, the person would perform the ritual dance (three steps forward and three steps back).

Each kw'inchikwa is now associated with a Catholic saint (or Jesus, in the case of the fiesta of *Padre Jesus* 'Father Jesus'). For the most part they follow similar patterns. Stanley Brandes' study of the fiesta system in Tzintzuntzan, Michoacan, elaborated on the ways inhabitants of the town used the fiesta cycle as an outlet for extraordinarily unruly behavior while at the same time reinforcing social control. This study draws from those insights but also departs from them in significant ways. For one, Tzintzuntzan is a community that is divided into those who are culturally P'urhépecha and those who are not. In common discourse the latter would be referred to as Mestizos, who are largely physically indistinguishable from the *Indios* 'Indians'. However, Cheran is a monocultural P'urhépecha community. In another respect, P'urhépecha communities deploy the fiesta system in ways thus far not accounted for in the anthropological literature. There is good reason for this. As previously mentioned, some ethnographers, such as Brandes and Foster, worked in non-P'urhépecha communities with a P'urhépecha presence, while other researchers such as Friedrich focused on language or politics, and still others, such as Beals, did not speak P'urhépecha and were unable to access ritual

life on a long-term basis, since they were only able to gather their information second-hand. This work, then, adds another layer of complexity to the study of P'urhépecha ritual life.

The Kw'inchikwa occurs across the entire town. It is a town-level event, but it also draws people from other communities into the town. In addition, it brings people from outside the home into the home. The streets near the central plaza are key sites of kw'inchikwa activity—from vendors to food stands. People decorate the *kópikwarhu* 'town center'. They place the log for the *Castillo* 'castle' there. There is live music—*orquestas* during the mornings and bands at night.

The two largest kw'inchikwa in Cheran are the *Octava* (for the town's patron saint, [Saint Francis of Assisi]) and the *Tsintskwa* 'resurrection' (for the celebration of Jesus's resurrection from the dead). In addition to those fiestas, the next most important fiestas are the *Kw'anikukwa*, *Ch'anantskwa* and *Tumpi Jueces*. *Octava* and *Tsintskwa* are fiestas proper (they involve religious symbolism, music is played day and night, and there are also secular activities similar to those at county fairs in the U.S.) whereas the *Kw'anikukwa*, *Ch'anantskwa* and *Tumpi Jueces* are more thoroughly ritualistic (although the ritual activity is different from the Catholic variety, since much of it would seem like mere "horseplay" to outsiders.) Inside Cheran, you quickly learn the yearly rhythm of fiestas. Generally, people look forward to them, because they are a time when frowns tend to become smiles—either out of genuine happiness or ritual drunkenness.

I will focus on the ritual dimensions of one of Cheran's most distinctive kw'inchikwa: kw'anikukwa, or Corpus. The name "Corpus" is a shortened form of the Latin phrase *Corpus Christi* 'body of Christ'. Corpus Christi is a Catholic holiday in remembrance of Christ's last supper with his disciples before his execution. The Catholic Church is responsible for setting the timing of Corpus, which is the second Thursday following Pentecost (which takes place on the seventh Sunday after Easter). Since Easter is a moveable feast, the timing of Corpus varies too. For example, the Corpus celebrations worldwide fell on May 26 in 2016 and on June 15 in 2017.

In Cheran the kw'anikukwa activities take place over a period of three days, the last day being the Catholic church's official day of Corpus Christi. I will provide the reader with an account based on my experiences across May 24, 25, and 26 of 2016. On May 24, the cargo-holders of the saint associated with Corpus, San Anselmo, were gathered in the town's outskirts at a place called *cruzhirhu* 'place of the cross.' They were accompanied by members of their kin networks and their guests. There must have been a hundred or more people present. Throughout the night people were engaged in ritual drunkenness, dancing to music, and eating food. San Anselmo was placed on a shrine in a space under a rustic wooden shelter.



Figure 14 Saint Anselm's altar in Cruzirhu

On May 25, the cargo-holders' group made a procession from their home to the courtyard of a small church called *Calvario* 'Calvary', then made their way from there down the street toward the town center. The procession consisted of ritual drunkenness and hive experts who carried large katarhakwas adorned with flowers and animals. These individuals also threw corn cobs and grain into the crowds of people watching them. I will provide further details about this activity later in the chapter. On the May 26, people engage in a ritual exchange of miniature items for salt in the plaza. The Catholic Church's official Corpus date is the final day of the fiesta, but the kw'anikukwa's most important activities take place the day before. People across Cheran refer to these activities as the focal activities when discussing

Corpus. Furthermore, depending on the participant's role, preparing for the fiesta can add several more days to the total. In particular, for someone who is a carguero there are many days of Corpus-related activities leading up to the fiesta itself.

To understand the kw'anikukwa is a difficult task. It serves as a microcosm of my observation that people use any given kw'inchikwa as a means to manipulate sacred and profane agents. To further elaborate on this claim, I draw from my two vantage points that provided me with descriptions of the processions. The first is that of a guest invited to accompany the *comisionados* 'cargo-holders' who receive San Anselmo from the town's main church. I provide a little information about what preceded the actual procession. According to my notes, the first kw'anikukwa-related event I saw in this cycle, a big feast, took place on April 21, 2016. The cargo-holders held this feast because they had received the saint from the main church and taken it to their home. People came to the feast bearing gifts (fruit and candles) that they gave to the cargo-holders' household. The saint was inside a decorated area that led to an altar near the entrance of the homestead. People entered the property to leave offerings of candles before the saint. Months later, these folks would participate in the procession I describe further below. The second vantage point consists of the observations I made as one of many people watching the procession along the streets leading to the town's plaza in 2017. At this time, I was seated beside Don Chatarra.

5.2.1 Participant: Drink and Dance

According to my notes, the first kw'anikukwa-related event I saw in this cycle, a big feast, took place on April 21, 2016. We walked towards the feast which was held in the home of the cargo-holders. Further up the street we could see a few large plastic tables with plastic chairs around them. Some people were seated while others remained standing. We were given a place to sit and served plates of food, then handed bottles of beer. The cargo-holders held this feast because they would receive the saint from the main church and take it to their home. People came to the feast bearing gifts (fruit and candles) that they gave to the cargo-holders' household. The cargo-holders decorated an area near the entrance of the homestead that led to the altar. People entered the property to leave offerings of candles in anticipation of the saint.



Figure 15 Cargo-holders greeting invitees to homestead

After we had eaten, we made our way in procession towards the plaza. Then as people exited the church, some were holding a box that housed the saint. The music started to blast, and people began walking, others moving in time to the

music, and others twirling, linked at the arms. We kept on in this manner until returned to the cargo-holders' homestead to place the saint on the altar. Some of the people present walked towards the living compound. The property owners had added some simple decorations to the open area. Inside there were many people seated along the walls, which left little space for those wished to enter and pay their respects to the saint. Before the saint were offerings of flowers and candles. The people had decorated the saint with a small vest of dollar bills (which is a custom of uncertain origin but also something done among some Italian Catholics).



Figure 16 Procession to carry San Anselmo to cargo-holders' homestead

The heat was beginning to bother me. I saw that others were uncomfortable too. My wife and I walked among other married couples and groups of young hive experts who comprised the cargo-holders' kinship network. I was paying close attention to the people carrying the katarhakwas on their backs. A cargo-holder noticed my interest, then said, "Intentalo tú" "Try it yourself". His wife doubled

down, “Si, pónselo” ‘Yes, put it on him.’ I tried my best to dissuade them, but failed. Then my spouse joined in, saying “Andale” ‘go ahead’. So, I gave in to the pressure. I realized that this was my moment to do exactly what generations of anthropologists had done before me: to participate intimately in our interlocutors’ lives and do the things that they do. Such thoughts didn’t help ease my nerves. I was breathing heavily, but conscious that I had to display a calm demeanor and do well, since people would be watching, as we all watched the men who carried the large katarhakwas.



Figure 17 Katarhakwa with wasp hives and stuffed wild cats

The sun beat down and as we trudged across rough dirt and up the slope towards Calvario. I began to feel tired. The katarhakwa looked heavy, but it turned out to be much heavier than I had imagined. Climbing up the incline accelerated our fatigue. The men around me looked tired. We were provided with

frequent drinks of liquor to bring about ritual drunkenness. The tequila helped alleviate the pain and made me feel a bit better. I could see that others felt the same. People were quick to provide a cargo-holder with more if he seemed to be suffering extreme pain and duress. As I tried my best to carry the katarhakwa, one of the cargueros smiled at me mischievously. He said, "Like this!" He pretended to have a heavy katarhakwa attached to his back and stomped into the ground to the music with his back hunched over, then twirled before zigzagging across and back towards us. When he returned, I heard him say, "Here, let me show you." He, along with a few other men, helped remove the wooden structure from my back then place it on his own. He smiled then boasted, "This is how you should do it. You must dance!"



Figure 18 A glimpse of female cargo-holder near a katarhakwa

Some women nearby smiled. The men remained stern. They were alternating between each other. They were tired, but the drinks helped them

continue. They continued even though the weight of the katarhakwas caused them pain. They had to be careful not to trip over or fall from exhaustion. The cargo-holders wished to remain upright for two reasons: to preserve the beautifully constructed katarhakwas and to spare themselves from ridicule. Who would want to be remembered as the guy who fell?

5.2.2 Observer: Spectators of Ritual

Don Chatarra met me at the agreed-upon time, then we walked over to X street. There were some people standing in front of buildings and others sitting on stools. Some were talking and others were silent. There were men and women and children, young and old. The old men sat glossy-eyed, and the old women quietly with their shawls and dignity. As time passed more people came until both sides of the street were filled. From a bird's eye view the people would have resembled two parallel files from Calvario church to the main street that headed to the plaza.

There were young ladies and middle-aged women. Two files at opposite ends of the street walking towards the plaza. The women were dressed in traditional style—white *wanenko* 'blouse' with embroidering on the shoulder and upper chest, with a blue *delantal* 'apron', long black skirt down to the ankles, hair nicely brushed, and *rebozo* 'shawl'. The ladies were carrying poles with big crosses at the top. Each pole is a different color. The ladies walking at the very front both held light blue poles, those behind them yellow, then brown. Behind all these ladies was a single older woman. Behind them were men holding candles. Behind this group a short distance off are the panaleros. You could have heard the screams and yells

growing louder, more random and overlapping so they nearly drown out everything else save for the music. People are shouting. There are children with katarhakwas and powdered faces (some of the young panaleros are slipping past and sneaking up on people to throw flour in their faces). Younger sons walked near their fathers, and the very youngest accompanied their mothers. There were mothers nearby holding the hands of the smaller children or carrying toddlers and babies in their shawls. There were little girls walking with their mothers. Some older people walked in pairs. Most folks were wearing sombreros. The sombreros are made of palm, some handmade and other machine-made.

The noise continually built up, died down as the groups made their way to the town's center, and built up again until hitting a peak. There were more people approaching. There were endless waves of people—the young men and young teenagers in small groups filling the street. The men wore hand-crafted palm sombreros. One young man held a snake in his outstretched hand as he danced around, showing it to the bystanders and participants. Another held a plastic *garrafone* 'plastic jug' filled with some alcoholic beverage, all are wearing flat-brimmed sombreros and had their faces whitened with flour. Most were dressed in t-shirts and jeans.

There was whistling and hollering as the street grew thick with bodies and the music grew more intense. The musicians repeatedly played the Corpus song. The katarhakwa carriers twirled red-faced and sweating, some taking small steps to the rhythm while other fresher participants moved rapidly, still others were drunk

and zigzagging aimlessly through the crowds. Some men stumbled along the street holding each other at the shoulder with drinks in their spare hands. They twirled and yell out, “*arisista*¹⁵.” There are women wearing embroidered blouses dancing in groups near the men watching the cargo-holders. A file of younger ladies link arms and bounce in unison to the rhythm of Corpus. Katarhakwas hover over the mass of moving bodies.

The katarhakwa is fashioned from two long intersecting poles which form a vertically stretched X. At the top portion where the poles are tied together are a board, and there is also one at the bottom. This is the basic structure. The panaleros adorn their katarhakwas with various items. They attach long leafy branches that hang over their heads. They also place wasp hives on the lower panel. They might add flowers, and live or stuffed animals. Some place hawks, owls, eagles or buzzards on their katarhakwas. Other people carry snakes or raptors and some carry armadillos. Each katarhakwa is decorated differently.

After the katarhakwas are adorned with hives, branches, flowers, and animals they weigh a lot. The panalero crouches down as his companions keep the katarhakwa upright by holding it in place. The panalero then slides upwards into a small gap at the front, where a rope or cord squeezes against his chest. He then grips the lower part of each pole with his hands and lifts the enormous load. You

¹⁵ The guys, not the females, participating in Kw’anikukwa yell out the term, “*arisista*” It is very much a Cheran custom, much like most of its kw’anikukwa rituals. The root, *ari-* means to say, thus, folks are beckoning onlookers to tell someone, implying they tell others what they have seen in the procession. It is a way ritualized mean of spreading one’s fame and prestige. Most younger participants in the ritual processions repeat the saying but are unaware of the word’s meaning. They just know it should be done.

quickly realize that the size, shape, and weight along with the conditions of the road, and state of exhaustion and inebriation all factor into how well someone manages to balance the katarhakwa and keep it upright.

To those familiar with the customs of ancient Mesoamerica, the sight of men holding these items on their backs are reminiscent of the long-distance traders or *pochtecaatl*. These traders carried goods on their backs across long distances and returned with other goods. The panaleros could also be considered to be trading in goods. From outside the town to the inside of the town. The dancing and noise provide entertainment and also request rain. Rain then nourishes the crops and forest.

As we sat along the small makeshift curb, looking at the ceaseless flow of people on the street, Don Chatarra smiled. People yelled out, *isi aristiya* danced by and others caused mischief. Some of the younger men looked drunk almost to the point of insensibility, red in the face, stumbling, sweating, liquor and *charape* 'homemade liquor' running down their necks onto their clothing. They carried those large, heavy katarhakwas on their back. People were thrilled to see the men decorated and dancing. As Don Chatarra remarked, "They dance and got to keep doing it. Dance hard, so that it rains. The more they dance, the more they drink, the more it rains. It's gotta count."

5.3 Discussion: Alleviating Uncertainties

People confront three sources of anxiety: uncertainties about others' behavior, uncertainties about the seasons, and uncertainties about the crops. The kw'anikukwa requires that some participants suffer, drink large quantities of liquor, and dance hard to ensure the rainfall. And yet, despite their exertions, as Nana Le said, "Sometimes it doesn't rain." In other words, the seasonal cycle should occur but there is no guarantee itself that it will. Hence, people must do their part to try to maintain it. They keep the ritual cycle that ensures the seasonal cycle, which in turn ensures the agricultural cycle. These cycles are intimately linked and together help support life—whether socially or physiologically. People who are attempting to ensure optimal conditions across the three sources of anxiety are participating in life-sustaining activities.

To ensure optimal conditions is an act of sustaining, generating, and perpetuating life—which ultimately depends on rainfall. While the official Catholic perspective revolves around the saints, such as San Anselmo, the greatest source of collective actions resides in the people themselves and their relationship to the three cycles. For instance, people participating in kw'anikukwa do not do so alone. They are always with family, and families are with each other and the other inhabitants of the town. The collective sacrifice amid disorder helps reinforce social life. In turn, it generates order.

The P'urhépecha hold rainfall in such high esteem for good reason: the region suffers from a scarcity of water. Grammatically, the P'urhépecha language treats

the rain as an agent. People discursively express the view that the rain and the saint—who is like an avatar for the rain itself—are agents. Among the P'urhépecha the saint is explicitly recognized as a sacred being, while the rain is covertly a sacred being, *Tata Janikwa* 'Father Rain'. In previous chapters, I described the patrilineal bias of kinship networks. People's lineages, 'houses' in the everyday parlance, are comprised of these paternal lines. Hence, the rain is represented in this foundational sense. The importance of rain for highlanders is best exemplified in *pirekwa*:

1. Tata Janikwa,
Father Rain
2. Ay tata janikwa
Oh, Father Rain
3. Xani sesi umantani ch'ararapunkwania
So good returning to cause lightning again
4. Mantani wexurhini
Each year

In lines 1 and 2 rain is established as a revered agent who is fundamental to the fabric of existence— particularly given that the P'urhépecha view kinship ties as essential and inextricable from life. The song also describes rain as a desired event that returns each year in lines 3 and 4. These events occur during the season referred to as *ementa*. *Ementa*, thus, is a homecoming of a powerful force that makes possible two related means of existence: ritual life and agricultural life.

Ementa exists in relationship with another dimension of the seasonal cycle, the dry season, or *k'arhinta*. *Ementa* roughly coincides with the months of June,

July, August and September, while k'arhinta usually occurs in February, March, April and May. During Ementa the rain drops rush from the clouds to the ground as if competing to see who can dive the hardest, and who is the coldest. People are quick to advise others to run alongside the walls of the houses under the eaves, so as to avoid becoming too wet. It gets very cold during the months of Ementa.

K'arhinta is a time of self-reflection, modesty, and petition. In the dry months, people prepare for the work that awaits them throughout the following months. In a sense they are preparing themselves for the upcoming kw'anikukwa.

In the kw'anikukwa, people dance to effect change in the weather—more specifically rainfall—which is therefore an attempt to effect changes in life. The rain is life. Much like the way people can manipulate one another and remain uncertain about each other's behavior, they display the same sets of behaviors with regard to the rain. They seek to appease San Anselmo as an intermediary.

Upon close examination of these cycles and activities, one finds parallels with a part-whole pattern. These cycles consist of partners that are linked across all three sets: kaxumpikwa-no kaxumpikwa, ementa-k'arhinta, tsiri-jatsini-p'ikuntani. The kw'inchikwa (which itself is part of a ritual cycle) comprises a community-wide activity that helps ensure that these cycles remain synchronized. In this way, they are also similar to P'urhépecha views of human behavior—in the sense that people say everyone should practice kaxumpikwa, and they actively attempt to ensure that they do. In other words, the following part-whole view does not exclude the

potential to run riot. Instead, people acknowledge difficulties and uncertainties. It is because of these realities that they try to alter courses of action.

People try to alter courses of action with community-wide activities. The foundational community-wide activity is the kw'inchikwa (in this case, the kw'anikukwa). It factors into the rain cycle, agriculture, and ritual life and behavior. In terms of agricultural activities, the sowing and harvesting of crops is labor-intensive. A man suffers as he plants, and he suffers as he harvests. He endures the heat of the sun, the weight of the tools, the ache of his back. The kw'anikukwa mirrors corn planting in the sense that someone who carries the katarhakwa endures the same hardships as a planter, only more intensely. One must suffer in front of others. In doing so, the sufferer demonstrates his strength and vitality.

People also bring various animals from the mountains into town. They parade them about as prized symbols of their prowess as mountain laborers. In the processions, these folks, engaged in the long trek from the cargo-holder's house to the town center, publicly display their sacrifice to others. Nevertheless, the separation between mountain and town is not blurred, since people parading the animals do so to evoke responses of wonder at things that are out of place. These are animals from outside human spaces of life. Outside the town, the mountains are spaces for the animals. Humans may work there, but they do not live there. It is not their domain.

5.4 Conclusion

News of my participation in a kw'anikukwa procession spread among my interlocutors. I became aware of this the next time I visited Tata Pe. Someone, Doña Z, even told him about it on that visit. Tata Pe focused on Doña Z's words. She was animated and boastful, conveying a sense of surprise and pride. Doña Z worked as a restroom attendant on the first floor of Cheran's city hall. I bumped into her the day of the kw'anikukwa, and she couldn't wait to share her surprising experience with Tata P. "So many people showed up," she said, "and all of a sudden, he says, 'Hi Aunty!' His face was nearly black with soot and spots of flour. He was wearing one of those sombreros, a palm sombrero, the one with the round top from the lake region. I didn't recognize him. Not at all!" Tata Pedro smiled, looked at me, laughed and nodded in approval.

Cheran's elderly people, and interestingly enough the non-elderly as well, consider certain regularities as potentials—some outcomes might occur, or they might not. It is not a given that people will behave in accordance with kaxumpikwa, that rain will fall, or that the rain will produce good grain. People live in a perpetual state of uncertainty over these three cycles (behavioral, seasonal, agricultural), which in turn produces deep anxiety. One of Cheran's main kw'inchikwas, the kw'anikukwa, alleviates those anxieties. People dance to ensure that the rain desires to fall. They dance for the saint to supplicate the rain. The saint is a representative, if not avatar, of the rain. In seeking good rain, people are indirectly seeking a good planting and harvest season. They are seeking good

results. By incorporating their kin networks in processions that gain attention, participants are displaying their status while also mediating other people's behavior.

Chapter 6 Endangered and Invulnerable

This dissertation examined spatial language and social relations among speakers of a critically endangered dialect of P'urhépecha in Cheran, Michoacan, Mexico. Through ethnographic and linguistic analyses, I displayed that P'urhépecha speakers grammatically and discursively reproduce a part-whole pattern. In other words, a given referent is always a part of its ground, the whole. The part-whole pattern is similar to P'urhépecha conceptualizations and embodiments of sociocentrism. P'urhépecha sociocentrism pervades face-to-face interactions where individuals regiment others through ideological notions of *kaxumpikwa* 'respect', kinship dynamics out of which people identify an individual as recapitulating token-level generalizations and exert reciprocal exchanges in ritualized fusions of paternal lineages, and fiestas that townsfolk use to control people, rain, and crops. Among the P'urhépecha, one is always part of a greater union.

The dissertation's title, *Endangered words and invulnerable worlds*, points to a problem of societal and linguistic import and a contradiction. First, I will discuss the problem: Language endangerment directs our attention to a breakdown in a dynamic involving speakers, language, and sites for speech. Underlying the breakdown between the variables mentioned above are powerful socio-economic,

political, and ideological underpinnings. The term endangered invokes a sense of fatality. An endangered animal is one whose species is close to dying out. Some have argued against framing this problem along the lines of endangerment (which implies death) since to do so could undermine attempts at language revitalization and discourage heritage language learners. I find the term appropriate since it captures the problem. Many languages have ceased to exist.

I framed the first part of the title endangered words precisely because researchers and laypeople have always been intrigued by a given lexicon: for instance, names for plants, places, people, things, and actions. In the P'urhépecha language, the locative suffixes of space (the obligatory grammatical morphemes used to describe location) only arise in words. The majority of P'urhépecha speakers cannot recognize these suffixes outside of their linguistic contexts. Cue the contradiction via invulnerable worlds.

The contradiction is best understood when considering previous research on spatial language. Scholarship has gone from accepting presumed invariant, spatial concepts that map onto different languages to realizing that different languages map out different parameters of space. The shift towards linguistic variation led researchers to revisit studies of linguistic relativity. They sought to ascertain if linguistic differences caused cognitive differences. Some concluded that differences matter, and others concluded they didn't. Within this debate, some researchers proposed that linguistic-based cognitive differences would appear across cultural

manifestations. Hence, the turn to ethnographic investigation of spatial language and cultural practice.

Returning to the P'urhépecha case in Cheran, the word is endangered, but socially the world is not. The fluent speakers of P'urhépecha are elderly and younger generations do not speak nor understand the language. However, younger generations of Spanish-speaking P'urhépecha reproduce sociocentrism. The similarities between part-whole and sociocentrism among the P'urhépecha warrant further investigations.

One line of inquiry could study spatial language across P'urhépecha communities. It would help to elicit data and study language use in context among etic sociological variables such as age, gender, education, degree of bilingualism. The next step would be then to compare these speech patterns to emic notions of speakers. The study could also elicit data from non-P'urhépecha Spanish speakers in Michoacan and other places. By comparing various speakers across communities with an additional line of Spanish speakers, one can pinpoint whether the findings in Cheran are unique or found at a regional level.

Similarly, another line of inquiry could compare P'urhépecha to other Mesoamerican languages with body-part spatial reference. How pervasive is body-part spatial reference in these languages? To what degree do speakers of these languages display sociocentrism? What does sociocentrism (if it exists) look like in these groups? Besides Mesoamerica, studies of language use in context among structurally different languages across the globe could help shed light on the

relation between spatial language and social life. The researcher could attempt to flesh out the link between obligatory-habituated part-whole spatial reference and sociocentrism in both instances. The research that provided the evidence for this study occurred amid a language endangerment crisis.

Many discussions have taken place between academics and endangered language stakeholders over the importance of documenting and studying endangered languages. In the academy, the issue is often one of preserving the knowledge residing in nouns that can offer insights into plants and medicine, for example. Underlining this focus is a pragmatist ideology that projects value into something only if it can serve some a revenue generating purpose. Under such a regime for profit, there is no such thing as intrinsic value. Indeed, given the capitalist nature of much of the planet's economic system, the focus is one of "profit over people." With this study, I have attempted to put people back into a place of importance. Any knowledge that has been produced need not be monetized, nor does it necessarily emerge from nouns that describe things, but rather it derives from speech practices embedded in intricate systems of social relations.

The study of the referential properties of spatial language is not merely an exercise in linguistic analysis, rather it is a gateway towards a comparative study of cultural patterns. As a result of the explosion of studies of spatial language in the 1990's, researchers began questioning whether languages were epiphenomena that shrouded a universal, systematic means to encode space. Studies of spatial language across language families served to prove that the grammatical properties

of language did in fact map out semantic parameters that were not isomorphic across languages (Bohnenmeyer et al 2015; Bowerman and Choi 2001; Levinson and Wilson 2006). Many studies focused on experimental means to determine whether these differences in spatial parameters made a difference in human thought and behavior. Another closely related line of inquiry, then, was to show a link between these language-based understandings of space and cultural practice. There was a need to find a systematic manifestation of a linguistic pattern across various representations of culture.

Indeed, the issue became one of observing and proving that a linguistic pattern and cultural pattern were linked. One cannot possess a cultural pattern if it is not acquired through social interaction. Social interactions are the basis for people socializing into and internalizing patterns of behavior. The key point is this: the pattern is of cultural origin. If it is not socially transmitted, it will cease to exist. Patterns of the complex sort that are discussed in this dissertation must be learned. They are not shared by people outside of the group. This is another implication of patterns arising through social interactions. Even when an analyst makes a surface-level evaluation of a group that reveals a similar-looking pattern to another, such as part-whole, for example, the ethnographer must conduct a systematic analysis of a society, then compare it to the other to determine if they are in fact the same meaningful sets of occurrences for both groups.

In essence, I am describing a line of argument that differs from notions of patterns as computations that are independent of social interaction. I am also

distinguishing a systematic study that displays a pattern across a society as not being necessarily the same as what one can gather about another society through superficial, anecdotal statements. One can posit that part-whole is a pattern guiding how folks conceptualize social life and how they organize it—the former underpins the latter and the latter is not readily perceivable without understanding the former, nor without evaluating social behavior among members of a population. The interplay between linguistic forms, linguistic use, and social practice is difficult to chart. We might not be able to describe with full confidence the direction of causality, but that might be because it is a give-and-take situation.

Through the case material presented, I showed how contemporary people—some elderly speakers of an endangered dialect of P'urhépecha and others their Spanish speaking kindred—reproduce a certain way of organizing despite various contact-induced cultural changes across time. The P'urhépecha are no different than most groups on the planet who have experienced contact-induced cultural changes. For instance, Catholic saints are venerated by the community, k-12 schooling is available to all, and there have been technological advances that far surpass anything that our ancestors only a hundred years ago could have imagined

P'urhépecha people do consciously describe reciprocal bonds. They can discuss why they should be honored, the consequences for disobeying, and the way of properly engaging in reciprocal exchanges. They do not describe part-whole. It is not something they discuss in terms of grammatical morphemes, or discursive acts of reference, nor in organizing their social relations. A part-whole pattern is not a

part of native exegesis since it lies beneath the threshold of awareness. Yet, a close inspection of what people say and do reveals that their sociocentrism is similar to a part-whole pattern.

Those who appear to be the last speakers of Cheran's dialect of P'urhépecha rely on default spatial forms not strategic ones. The idea of strategic use of spatial forms conveys an image of speakers carefully planning and choosing words. Instead, speakers habitually use default spatial forms that express a speaker's intentions in a way that is understood by an addressee.

In a moment of speech, (either an actual situation or a intertextual narrative), addressers deploy grammatical morphemes (e.g., suffixes of locative space) to convey a message to an addressee. Because of the nature of paradigms, one might reason then that choice of suffix evinces strategic deployment. Speakers seem to make judgement calls quickly, so when presented with a circumstance they draw from experience and a referent's or ground's geometric properties to rely on a default form. A default form has the luxury of most likely being used by all individuals in community of speakers. Grammatical patterning and default discourse are not just random stabs in the dark, since they are semi-predictable, given the people's speech usually falls within a certain radius of uses (i.e., it exhibits family resemblance since it is similar enough to common use as to not stand out as peculiar, or worst yet, unintelligible).

The sociocentric patterns of kinship across Cheran affect every interaction, from the dyadic exchange (which has been shown to always implicate more than the

immediate parties within it), to the circulation of texts that highlight negative male behavior to reinforce ideological conventions among people. People see in individuals their paternal kinship lineages that carry stigma or approval, they engage with each other in reciprocal exchanges to avoid causing discord and so that they may call upon others for future assistance. People relieve the many anxieties arising from uncertainties over the behavior of others, the seasonal weather, and the cultivation of corn through elaborate rituals to ensure rainfall—which is also a means of ensuring good behavior and a bountiful harvest. The P’urhépecha system of sociocentrism displays a similar pattern to part-whole. One is always a part of a bigger whole. I, thus, end this study with an ethnographic vignette below.

In August of 2017, it was raining, hard. I stopped by the house of one of my favorite elderly interlocutors to say goodbye before I left Cheran to return to Michigan. He greeted me with a question, “*Hermanito* ‘little brother’, how long does it take?” “Three days,” I replied. He squinted his eyes while talking and moved his head closer to me since his hearing was very bad. His wife, Nana K, interjected with a loud burst into his other ear, “he said three days!” His eyes lit up like two bright pennies then shrank down again into little slits. He smiled then said, “That’s fast. When will you return? All that we shared with you will be inside this?” He pointed to my recorder. I nodded since I knew that he knew. He took pride in knowing that people from distant places would learn about the P’urhépecha. That pride was only second to the pride he took knowing that the recordings will be used

to help guide younger generations of Cheran's P'urhépecha in learning to speak the language. "*Isisti jati ya,*" he said, 'that's how it is.'

I often think back to that moment, since it is a microcosm of my time among the elders of my people. Some of them, unfortunately, have since passed away. Others still live and await my return. While they wait, time takes its toll on their bodies and minds. I love and miss them dearly. One day, I will return and never leave.

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